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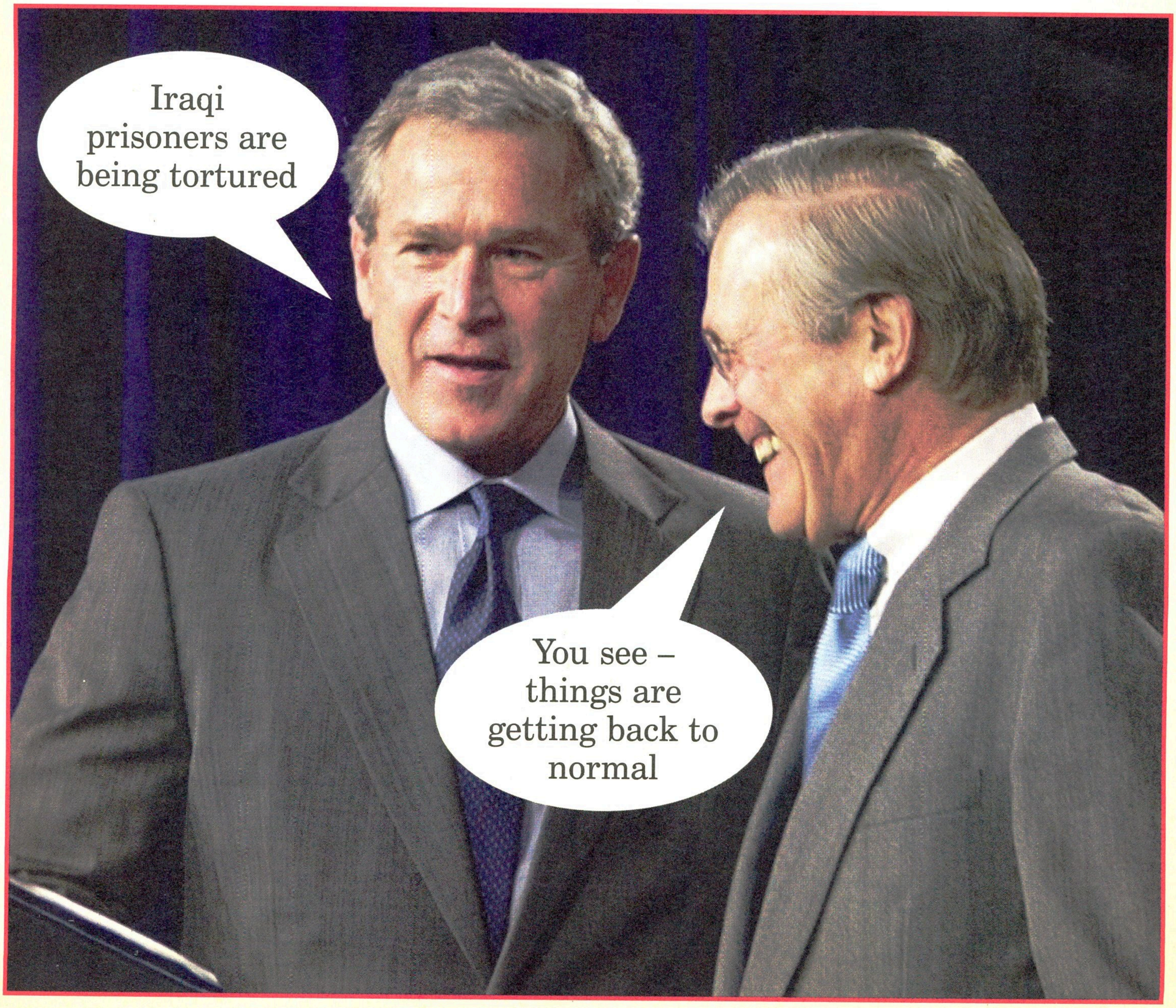
PRIVATE EYE

THE PICTURE THAT SHAMED AMERICA



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A Message From Luc VandeGnome, The Ex-Chairman of Gnomes & Spencer

IT IS with a feeling of deep sadness and resentment that I have chosen to be resigned as chairman of Gnomes & Spencers.

The excuse given is that I only work for G&S for five minutes a year and that I have 700 other jobs, including the chairmanship of the Bank of Montenegro, Fly Lithuania, the No-Frills Railway and the South American wine-to-mining conglomerate Vino Tinto Zinc.

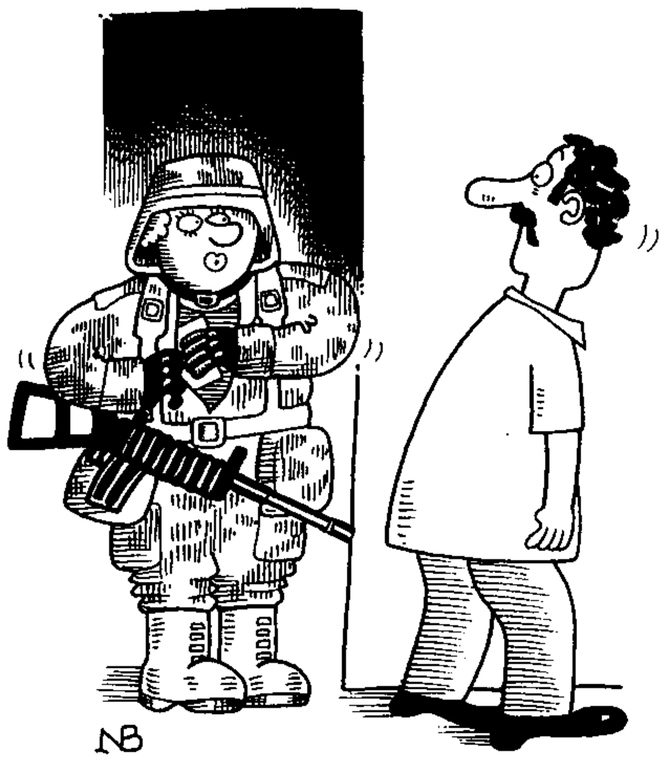
This only goes to show how deeply unfashionable Gnomes & Spencer have become – they are now the only company in the world that does not have me on the board!

Furthermore this high street retailer has long prided itself on its reputation for taking back faulty, damaged or unwanted goods.

Yet when I myself asked to be taken back they bluntly refused.

Need I say more?

Luc VandeGnome
c/o The Jobcentre



"Psst! You want dirty photos?"

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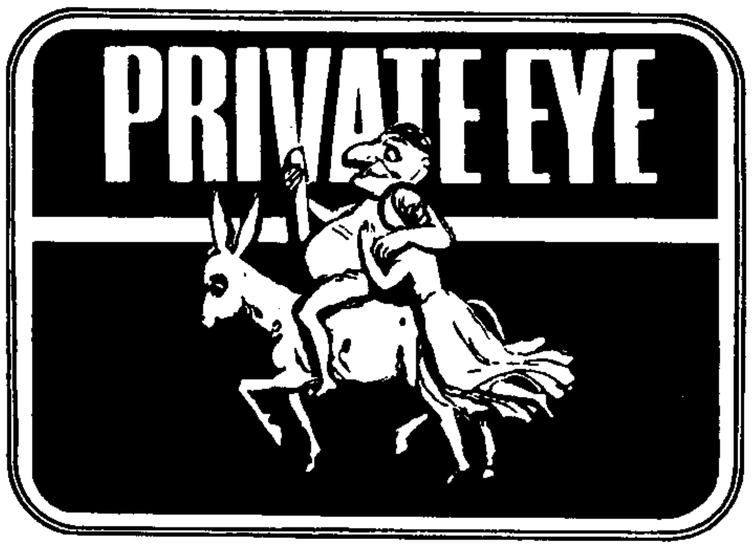

THE *Sun* pulled no punches in its condemnation of the *Mirror* for printing dubious photos which supposedly show the abuse of Iraqi prisoners.

"Pictures of British troops appearing to abuse and injure an Iraqi prisoner were guaranteed to inflame an already volatile situation," ranted an editorial on 3 May. "The pictures may have been faked as some sort of sick joke. Well, it isn't funny… There's a lot more than just the army's honour at stake."

The *Sun* was rather less sensitive about its own front page story of May 2003, when a soldier from the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers was arrested after trying to develop photographs of colleagues stringing up Iraqi PoWs from a fork-lift truck and forcing them to simulate sex acts. Unable to print the photos themselves – they had been confiscated by police – the *Sun* commissioned a vivid set of "artist's impressions" which it splashed across three pages while warning readers that this was just the beginning of a "hornet's nest of horror" which was waiting to emerge.

The story was quickly followed up by every other national newspaper and a spokesman for the MoD swiftly confirmed that an investigation was under way – though it seems, like everything else, to have passed defence secretary Geoff Hoon by.

When the news emerged this week that a number of the regiment's members are to be prosecuted over the incident, the *Sun* dealt with this belated confirmation of its scoop by, er, ignoring it completely and devoting its front page instead to an editorial "saluting a nation's heroes".

RUPERT MURDOCH's chosen emissary to inform Blair that he would lose the support of the *Screws* and the *Sun* unless he held a referendum was Irwin Stelzer, the Dirty Digger's long-standing friend and adviser.

But Murdoch is not the only corporate titan to whom Stelzer has hired himself. During the late nineties, he used his columns in the *Sunday Times* and elsewhere to praise Enron's ruthless approach to the energy market. At no point did he deign to mention that he was simultaneously trousering $50,000 from Enron. It was only *after* the Houston energy giant went belly-up that he disclosed these payments.

At least Stelzer remained loyal to the company even when it went into liquidation. In 2002 he contributed an article to the *Guardian* headed "Why Enron deserves our gratitude". Some wags wondered if he hadn't perhaps confused the word "my" with "our". He is thus the perfect man to deliver the ultimatum to the prime minister. After all, Blair's Labour party never had any problem with taking Enron's filthy lucre either.

VOSPER is an unusual Christian name, especially for a woman. But it seems to have brought good fortune for "new" Labour's leading theorist, Baroness Tessa Ann Vosper Blackstone.

On 27 January, just months after retiring as a junior minister, the baroness was recruited to the board of Vosper Thorneycroft (now rebranded VT), the well-known south coast arms and warships manufacturer.

VT doesn't intend to turn her ladyship into an arms dealer, however. As a press release trumpeted: "Tessa Blackstone will bring to the board a wealth of experience in government matters and in particular in education, an area where VT is targeting a substantial expansion of their business." The baroness was of course minister of state for education in the "new" Labour government from 1997 to 2001, and many colleagues recall her powerful public criticism of private schools and private education generally.

Uncle Sham

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LIKE many MPs with Home Counties constituencies, Nicholas "Fatty" Soames is worried about government plans to impose more houses in his area.

In March he told his constituents in Mid Sussex: "The government is adopting a centralist 'dictate and provide' approach in the housing market that will strip local communities of their say, bulldoze green spaces and put areas like Sussex at risk of being covered in concrete."

Among the big house-builders eager to cover more of Sussex in concrete are the Berkeley group, Persimmon and Crest Nicholson. All have built in the county and Crest Nicholson has just put up a not entirely popular estate at Bolnore village in the heart of Fatty's constituency.

FACT: All three are subsidiaries of Framlingon Dual Investment Trust, whose chairman is, er, one Nicholas Soames MP.

THE exam season is already off to a great start with two cock-ups by the *Eye*'s old friends at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

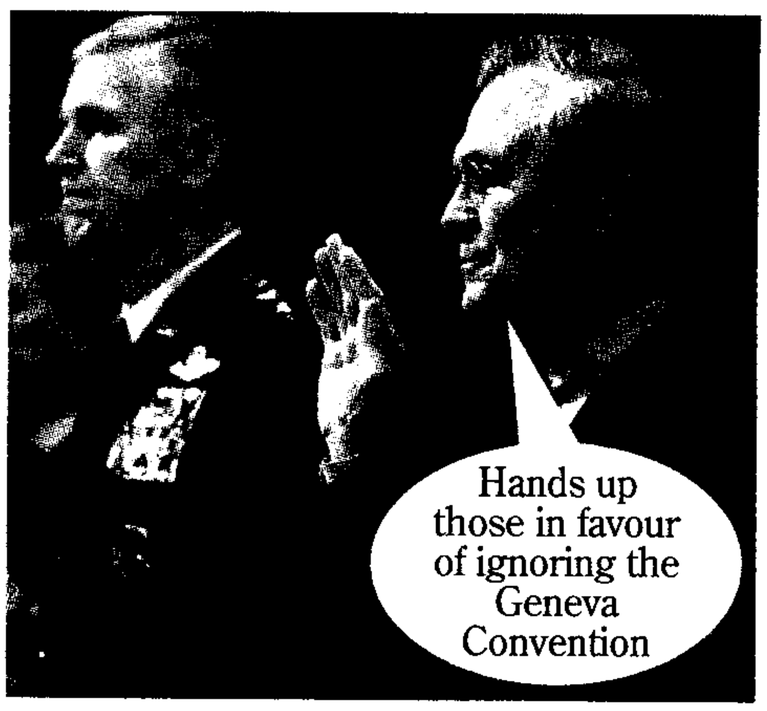
Deliveries of the Key Stage 3 science tests were found to have been botched when some schools opened their packets of papers only to find the same test children had already taken in the morning. Other schools didn't have enough copies of the test and teachers had to race to photocopiers.

Meanwhile a Level 2 key skills exam in information technology may have looked very familiar to some of the nearly 5,000 students sitting the exam – since it was an exact duplicate of the previous year's exam. No wonder the QCA officially frowns on schools using old papers for practice and mocks. But even if schools did follow that guideline, many of the students may have been resitting the exam after failing the previous year.

MYSTIC MARK

FURTHER visions from the crystal ball of Mark Steyn…

"In a year's time, Iraq will be, at a bare minimum, the least badly governed state in the Arab world and, at best, pleasant, civilised and thriving." (*Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 2003.)



Street of Shame

MOST Fleet Street pundits were aghast at John Scarlett's appointment as head of MI6 last week. But not David Rose of the *Observer*, who wrote an adulatory feature about the new spy chief's brilliant "operational strengths and personal qualities".

Scarlett's appointment as "C", according to Rose, owed nothing to cronyism: it was simply a recognition that he is "the best man for the job". However, Rose's profile omitted one small item from Scarlett's dazzling CV. In 1999 the selfsame David Rose made a BBC documentary about Soviet defector Vasili Mitrokhin, the KGB's former archivist, which revealed inter alia that a British woman called Melita Norwood had spied for Russia while working at the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association.

Rose insisted that he identified Norwood from "information gleaned in the US", but an inquiry by parliament's intelligence and security committee later concluded that he had in fact been tipped off directly by MI6. And who was the generous spook who provided Rose with details of the Mitrokhin dossier? Though the source was never identified, it was in fact... John Scarlett.

THE *Daily Mirror*'s absolute certainty that British troops are abusing Iraqi prisoners, whether or not their photographs are genuine, is matched only by the paper's certainty a year ago that they were not.

When Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins of the Royal Irish Regiment was accused of beating and threatening PoWs, the paper rushed to his defence, assuring readers that it was merely "an attempt to smear an inspirational war leader". "This is the first time we have heard a word of complaint about the British forces in Iraq," declared the "voice of the *Daily Mirror*" on 22 May, opening its phone lines for other soldiers to declare that "these allegations must be total rubbish".

MIRROR Group chairman Sir Victor Blank's declaration last week that "the core issue is not the photos but the allegations" was a brave one coming just five weeks after his company was forced to pay significant damages to Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins over a fabricated story in the *Sunday Mirror* about him allowing his troops to open fire on surrendering Iraqis last year.

The *Sunday Express* was also ordered by the high court in Belfast to pay damages to Collins after falsely claming that he had allowed a henchman of Saddam's to be doused in petrol and set on fire — not that this stopped its daily stablemate from pissing all over the *Mirror*'s exclusive by claiming to "reveal the shameful truth about fake torture in Iraq" last week.

Most hacks in Fleet Street believe the *Express* fury stems simply from Richard Desmond's pique that he was unable to snap up the urination photos for one of his stable of "specialist" magazines.

"I ran into some Parkinson supporters"

THE law lords' decision in the Naomi Campbell case turned not on whether the model was a drug user, but on whether the *Mirror* had a right to publish details of her treatment for what they called a "serious medical condition" and to photograph her during her recovery.

In their judgments the five lords cited everything from 1849's *Prince Albert v Strange* to the rather more recent *Douglas v Hello! Ltd*; but only Lord Hoffman mentioned the case of *Earl Spencer v United Kingdom* — an attempt to toughen privacy laws which was dismissed by the European court of human rights in 1998.

That case arose after a newspaper published pictures of Countess Spencer in the grounds of a clinic where she was being treated for eating disorders and alcoholism. And who was the editor who decided to print them, earning himself — against some competition — the biggest bollocking of his career? Step forward Piers "learning curve" Morgan!

"ORGY of Greed" yelled a headline in the *Daily Mirror* on 20 February this year, as the paper savaged bosses at the Royal Bank of Scotland. "Customers and staff have been ruthlessly exploited by directors trousering seven figure bonuses for slashing jobs and cutting services," it fumed.

There was no such indignant report — no report at all, in fact — in the *Mirror* last week, when a group of investors refused to endorse a plan to give one company director an annual bonus of £458,000 (matching her salary) and award £383,000 to another for just five weeks' work. Then again, the two lucky executives were Sly Bailey and Philip Graf; and the company involved was Trinity Mirror, owner of the *Mirror* titles.

PS: In August last year, shortly after taking over at the *Mirror*, Bailey announced the slashing of 550 jobs.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"An amazing SEVEN THOUSAND immigrants from the new Europe poured into Britain yesterday... The delight of Czech coal miner Jan Soltisik, 34, at Stansted airport was typical among the arrivals. The father of two, who has found a job on a London building site, said: 'I love England and the English — they like pets, Marmite, whisky and beer and football.'"

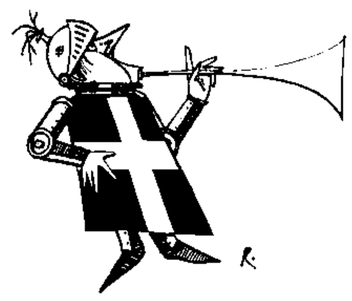
— David Brown, *Sunday People*, 2 May, reporting on "a May Day stampede that kept immigration officers at full stretch".

"Only a handful of people from the new member states hoping to start new lives in the UK arrived on flights to Stansted yesterday morning. [They included] Jan Soltisik, 34, from Ostrava in the Czech Republic... 'I love England because English love traditions. They like pets, Marmite, whisky, beer and football,' he said."

— Anushka Asthana, *Observer*, 2 May, reporting that "the predicted wave of immigrants is a trickle".

"I'VE just done *The Weakest Link* with Anne Robinson," Garry Bushell reveals in the *Sunday People*. "I was rubbish. My brains were scrambled through insomnia but that's no excuse."

Actually, Bushell had been telling friends for weeks that he would go on *The Weakest Link* and deliberately make an idiot of himself because he thought that would earn him more publicity than playing it straight. And Garry needs all the publicity he can get: he has a novel out next month.



EYE TOLD YOU SO

"MUCH speculation in 10 Downing Street over what is already being dubbed 'Tony's lavender list' and who will be up for a gong in the next honours. Step forward the 'three Margarets'... Margaret McDonagh was a general secretary of the Labour party and is the only former party head to hold office under Blair who has not been rewarded with a seat in the Lords. Margaret Prosser is a former senior official with the left-wing Transport and General Workers' Union who, along with her trade union colleague Margaret Wall has helped ensure that Labour's national executive committee could always be relied upon to vote the 'right way'. Then there is Tony Blair's veteran pollster and sometime soothsayer, Philip Gould, who seems to have had to wait a good deal longer than most to receive his just reward."

— *Private Eye*, 2 April 2004.

"The Queen has been graciously pleased to signify Her intention of conferring Peerages of the United Kingdom for Life upon the undermentioned... Margaret Josephine McDONAGH, formerly General Secretary of the Labour Party... Ms Margaret Theresa PROSSER OBE, Chair, Women's National Commission and formerly Deputy General Secretary, Transport and General Workers' Union... Margaret Mary WALL, formerly National Secretary and Head of Policy, AMICUS... Philip GOULD, Chairman, Philip Gould Associates."

— Life Peers List issued by 10 Downing Street, 1 May 2004.

The status of the state to change from *emirate* to *kingdom*, and that the national council to be *bi-camel* i.e., two-chambers system.

Voice of Bahrain

Number crunching

£5,000

- amount the *Mirror* paid two soldiers for their set of Iraqi torture photos
- amount the *Mirror* made per picture every time anyone else used them

AMANDA PLATELL has still not forgiven Rosie Boycott for sacking her as editor of the *Sunday Express*. In her latest media column in the *New Statesman*, otherwise known as Amanda's Weekly Job Application, Platell recalls the reign of terror initiated by Boycott as editor-in-chief of both the daily and Sunday titles.

"Boycott oversaw, as she had done at the *Independent*, the most swingeing staff cuts," she writes." Many of the existing staff were not even sacked with proper redundancy packages but put on the drip feed, a salary until you get another job. Isn't it great how some socialist bosses treat their workers?... There were days on the *Sunday Express* when we had so few staff that it was a miracle we even got the paper out."

Staff who lost their jobs at the *Independent* and the *Mirror* in the 1990s may also have other memories, however. When David Montgomery took over the titles he appointed a hatchet-woman to impose union derecognition and "swingeing staff cuts" on the workforce. The name of that hatchet woman? Amanda Platell.

WRITING in the London *Evening Standard* about his fabulous new slimming regime, the formerly pinguid historian Andrew Roberts can't pass up the opportunity for a typically shameless bit of product placement.

In the accompanying photo of this young Adonis, propped up for no apparent reason among the pots of yoghurt and Marmite that constitute his new diet, is a new biography of Catherine de Medici by one Leonie Frieda – Roberts's latest girlfriend.

"THIS is the picture that exposes Manchester United's supposed ring of steel against terrorism as a shambles," the *Sunday Mirror* announced on 25 April, alongside a photo of its hack Martin Coutts "working as an official match steward after turning up unannounced just three hours before kick-off."

It warned that Coutts, who was positioned at the foot of the East Stand, "could easily have run on to the pitch and interrupted the match. More worryingly, he could have planted a bomb inside the ground or attacked one of the players." As *Mirror* hacks so often do.

Oddly, the paper omitted to mention that Coutts was in fact rumbled by police within minutes and taken away for questioning. He appeared before Trafford magistrates on 27 April to answer the charge that he got into the football ground by allegedly stealing a steward's pass and bib – and not just any old steward, but his own flatmate Andy Corbett, a genuine steward at Old Trafford, who had taken the weekend off.

The case has now been adjourned to 18 May, when the chief prosecution witness will be none other than, er, Andy Corbett. If the magistrates find against him, Coutts could be looking for both a new flatmate and a new job.

NEWSPAPER diarists usually have a high opinion of themselves. But the *Sunday Telegraph*'s Mandrake columnist Tim Walker – who learned his trade at the feet of the master, Nigel Dumpster – is in a league of his own.

Under the heading "We are Snubbed", he informed readers that "a bubbly girl named Eleanor Macnair" had invited him to a celeb-laced bash hosted by Tony Blair at the foreign office to celebrate EU enlargement – but then told him, the day before the party, that he couldn't come after all.

"Eleanor declined to explain this latest U-turn by the PM," he wrote, "but Carole Caplin told me the other day that she and Tony had been less than happy that I have lately been giving space to Peter Foster, her former boyfriend. Foster, for his part, reckons that the telephone and email conversations I've had with him were 'monitored'."

He concluded with a dramatic flourish: "Tony, I am sorry, but Mandrake will not be intimidated."

Alas for his self-aggrandising conspiracy theories, the same invitation had been sent to all Fleet Street's diarists and been similarly revoked at the last minute. And for why? Downing Street thought better of allowing a posse of gossip-hacks to prey on the guests and risk a diplomatic fracas with our new European partners.

FINANCIAL hack Damien McCrystal was eased out of the *Evening Standard* last month. The excuse given was that the paper no longer had the space to accommodate his City Diary.

Lo and behold, two weeks later the *Standard*'s City editor Chris Blackhurst has emailed McCrystal's former contributors urging them to send tips and stories to a new daily column called "City Spy", which is to appear on page 2 of the business section – exactly where McCrystal's old diary appeared.

So what is the difference? Blackhurst explains that the new diary will be "more responsive to the news of the day than the previous incumbent". This is thought to refer to McCrystal's occasional inability to be fully "responsive" in the afternoons, especially after a five-hour lunch.

CELEBRATING the beginning of her third decade with the paper in 2000, the *Sun*'s agony aunt Deidre Saunders was clear about the biggest change she had seen during her reign.

"What has really changed the landscape for people of all ages in sexual relationships is the mass marketing of pornography… it has been given a whole new, previously unimaginable surge of energy by the internet. Instead of a gentle, personal and intimate exploration of developing sexuality, young people feel they should be sampling a whole variety of antics they have seen on their PC."

Those in any doubt that this is true can log on to thesun.co.uk, where in addition to the delights of page3.com, one-handed surfers can now enjoy a whole new service: "With our Dear Deidre archive, you can see *hundreds of saucy photo casebooks* and thousands of readers' letters, from as little as 50p."

Thrills include "I ran in naked and found my boyfriend bedding my brother", "My boss's teenage daughter blackmails me to have sex", "Pregnant after sex on pool table with randy workman" and "I'm so mad on bonking that I'm losing the plot".

THERE's a purge on at Express Newspapers. No surprises there – with Dirty Des in charge there always will be – but his latest cost-cutting wheeze is the most ingenious yet.

Desmond wants to move the City desk of the *Express* to Broughton. Yup, that is Broughton in the Cumbrian fells. An odd place from which to cover the Square Mile, perhaps, but at least it'll give the *Express* a tremendous lead over its rivals in providing up-to-date sheep prices.

STATUESQUE *Daily Star* editor Dawn Neesom has achieved another first by daring to criticise her boss. In a recent conversation with Richard "Dirty" Desmond, she complained about the antique flavour of the latest CD giveaways – one "all new top ten CD" featured such all-new tracks as "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and his Comets.

Desmond was unmoved, saying that although Dawn might not like these songs, many of her readers would. To reinforce his argument, he pointed out bespectacled Chris Campbell, an under-pressure downtable sub pressed into action on the backbench due to his chairman's never-ending quest for cheaper operations.

"I mean, look at him," Dirty Des bellowed. "He's an ugly four-eyed fucker – but his girlfriend probably thinks he's all right."

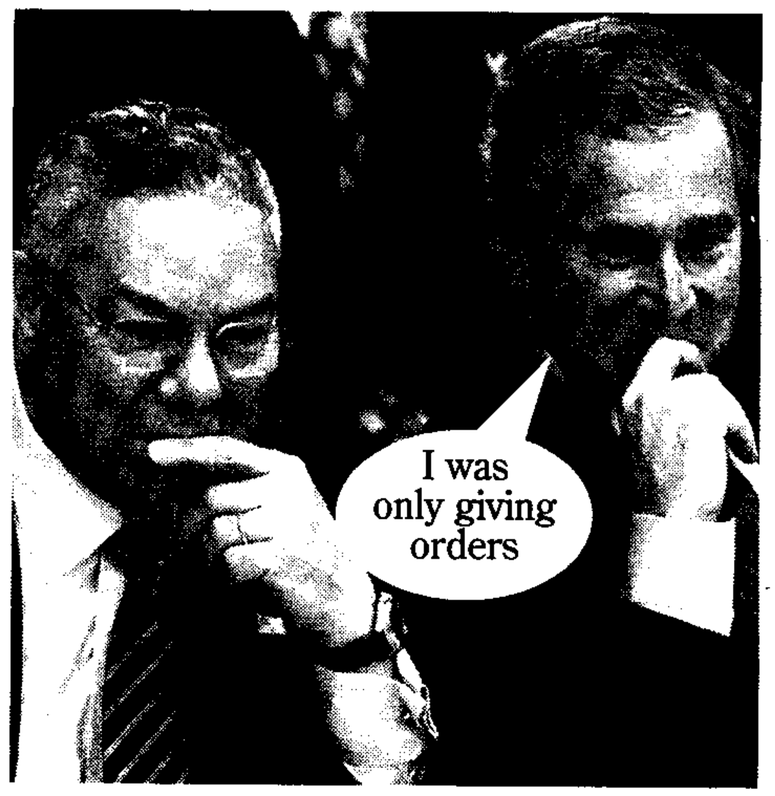
"No Aurelia luv, you have a normal 'squat-pop-out it comes' like the rest of 'em!"

HARSH WORDS

Introducing an occasional series devoted to the new callousness...

"The shooting left a horrible atmosphere here for a while. It made you aware of all the terrible things that go on. But I don't think it has affected house prices."

— Former neighbour of Jill Dando, quoted in the News of the World, *25 April.*



FOLLOWING the unmourned loss of its previous deputy editor Guy Adams to the *Indie*, the *Telegraph*'s "Spy" diary column has now appointed a successor. She is Celia Walden, the statuesque daughter of former Tory minister George Walden.

Adams's parting gift to the paper was to run a bogus story which cost the paper £80,000. Celia, however, pays much closer attention to her sources. When her current employer, the *Mail on Sunday*, sent her to interview the dashing chef Jean-Christophe Novelli she ended up having an affair with him.

Spy's editor, the slightly seedy Old Etonian Charlie Methven, obviously admires such dedication to duty. Another of his recent recruits is one Kiki King, whose most notable achievement while working for the *Mirror*'s 3AM column last year was to reveal that singer Lee Ryan from boy-band Blue was going out with "the woman of his dreams" — er, herself.

At least Celia Walden's appointment shows she doesn't bear grudges: her intimate friendship with Novelli was disclosed two months ago by none other than the *Telegraph*'s diary column, then called London Spy.

LUNCHTIME O'DONE WRITES...

"When I accompanied the Beaufort Hunt in Gloucestershire two years ago, the event proved a blueprint for a Blairite experiment in social inclusion. During the day, the hunt attracted a burger van driver from London, a plumber from Burford and a local waitress as well as a couple of m'lords a-leaping… In rural areas, hunting events, from quiz nights to tea dances, bring the community together in an informal arena where Westminster policies, so clearly influenced by urban prejudices, are discussed with as much fervour as BSE and organic farming… Not that any of this will wash with New Labour. Tony Blair has made it clear that his government is happy to do away with… the way of life cherished by certain communities." — Cristina Odone, *Observer*, 3 March 2002.

"Despite the great PR they enjoy, country folk are not terribly nice. How many times will some mule-head hog a country lane with his tractor, inching along while a queue of vehicles builds up behind him? How many toffs get away with outrageous churlishness because feudal forelock-tugging survives in the shires?… Next time the hicks from the sticks try to enlist your sympathy in their latest battle to preserve their hallowed way of life, don't lift a finger. They're not the best of Britain – they're the worst." — Cristina Odone, *Observer*, 28 March 2004.

100 Years Ago

THE Duke of Devonshire once complained bitterly to Private Eye about being made "runner-up" in the White's Club Shit of the Year competition.

"I should have won," he said.

NEWS that the defence research company QinetiQ has developed a body scanner which could be in use in airports within a year will have investors at the US venture capital giant the Carlyle Group rubbing their hands together in glee.

Carlyle, *Eye* readers will recall, paid a ludicrously cheap price for a major stake in the ministry of defence's research arm — a mere £42m for mangement control and a third share of QinetiQ — when the former Defence Research and Evaluation Agency was broken up in 2001 to form QinetiQ and its sister agency, the Defence Scientific and Technology Laboratory (DSTL).

Last week Gerald Howarth, the Tory MP for Aldershot, explored the intricate financial arrangement of this sell-off when he asked the MoD how much of (the entirely state-owned) DSTL's revenue had come from QinetiQ and, by contrast, how much DSTL had had to pay to the part-privatised QinetiQ since its creation.

Adam Ingram, the armed rorces minister, revealed that in the last three years QinetiQ had brought in a total of £48.8m for DSTL, whereas money flowing the other way came to a staggering £178.71m.

IN the Thatcher and Major years the Tories made much noise about how voluntary organisations should give greater help to the NHS in areas such as care of the elderly and the disabled.

Then, it served as a handy excuse for under-investment by the government but nothing much happened to bring it about. Now, as so often under "new" Labour, Tony Blair has seized on an old Conservative idea and is set to take it further than Margaret Thatcher ever did.

Stand by for one of the Labour manifesto's Big Ideas: the shuffling off of substantial amounts of responsibility for providing public services to the voluntary sector. It was hinted at last week in a little reported speech by former health secretary and Blair ally Alan Milburn, in which he said that in future the Leonard Cheshire foundation might run support services for the disabled and the Terrence Higgins trust might be put in charge of Aids testing, and so on.

Milburn was speaking at the annual conference of the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (Aveco), which is headed by one Stephen Bubb.

A hundred years ago Bubb was "Red" Ted Knight's chief whip on "loony Lambeth" council. In 1986 he and 31 other councillors were surcharged and disqualified from holding office for refusing to set a rate in protest at the Thatcher government's curbs on local authority spending. But, like Milburn himself, Bubb has long buried his left-wing past. He is now flavour of the month with the Blairites because he has devised a mechanism called "sure funding" to enable charities to borrow large sums so they can compete with private companies for long-term contracts.

It was originally called "VFI" (Voluntary Finance Initiative — *geddit?*); but that moniker has been dropped, perhaps because it sounds so like the hugely unpopular PFI on which it is modelled. Nevertheless it appeals to Tony Blair greatly because it side-steps the public versus private debate… by being neither. Brilliant!

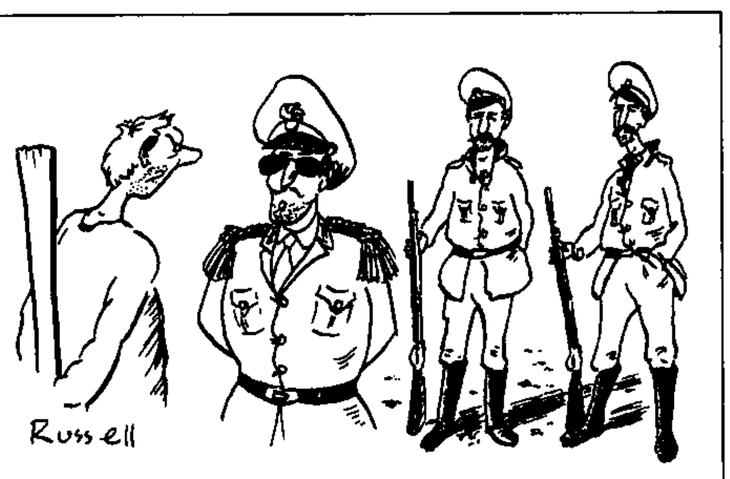
IF FORMER home office immigration minister Beverley Hughes ever feels the resignation blues creeping on, she can always cheer herself up by contemplating what to do with a £200,000 windfall she is in line for as a resident of Dolphin Square in Pimlico, London's poshest housing estate (*Eyes passim*), where she has rented a flat since 1997.

Last month Westminster council, which owns the lease of the estate which is home to scores of MPs, lords and bishops, agreed to dispose of its interest for £250m, having informed tenants' reps that regardless of who the lease was eventually sold to (there having been 27 expressions of interest at the last count), residents of the 1,058 flats would be allowed to keep their low rents, buy their flats, or sell their leases. Doing the latter would bring profits of at least £200,000 to each tenant.

Whether Bev takes the money and leaves or stays put in the hope of a come-back-all-is-forgiven phone call from Number Ten, one thing is for sure. Those who will not be benefiting from the changes at Dolphin Square will be the 150 cleaners, chambermaids and maintenance staff, many of whom, as Ms Hughes knows only too well, hail from Eastern Europe and earn less than £10,000 a year.

Two years ago they went on strike after their claim for a £1,000 London weighting allowance was rejected. At the time Bill Morris, then general secretary of the TGWU, told the *Independent on Sunday*: "This is a case of Upstairs, Downstairs." Hughes told the *Sindie*: "I am very concerned to hear about the low pay-rates of pay. I think most of the tenants would want them to be as well paid as possible and I will be investigating this and discussing the issue with my colleagues."

Today, the 150 staff are as poorly paid as ever.



"I regret, Senor, no last cigarette. This is our workplace."

CONGRATULATIONS to Kirsty McNeill, Labour's new parliamentary candidate in Southwark and Bermondsey. Reporting her selection under the headline "Victory for a Blair Worshipper", the *New Statesman* quotes her praising the prime minister as "a vote-winner who has headed the best government that this country has ever had".

Kirsty has not always been so on-message. Until a mere two years ago, when she graduated from Balliol College Oxford, she was a fire-breathing Glaswegian left-winger. She opposed the war against the Taliban in the purplest of prose. She was implacably opposed to tuition fees, let alone top-up fees, and as president of the Oxford University students' union she led a sit-in at the Bodleian library in protest at the treatment of students who refused to pay. She denounced the university authorities as a "tin-pot dictatorship".

Nor has she always been so complimentary about the Dear Leader. Interviewed by the *Daily Mail* in 2001 she accused Blair of "moving towards privatising education". Two years earlier, when he came to the Sheldonian in Oxford to give a lecture, she was behind the security barriers, yelling: "Are you Thatcher in disguise?"; "Tony Blair, shame on you, shame on you for turning blue!"; "Tony Blair's a Tory, he wears a Tory's hat, and when he sees my grant cheque he says I'm having that."

Still, it was all a long time ago…

THE Lib Dems are up to their old (dirty) tricks again, this time in the London mayoral elections.

Last week their candidate Simon Hughes was condemned for a leaflet which crudely attacked his Conservative rival, Steven Norris, over his day job as chairman of the troubled construction giant, Jarvis.

The leaflet "cynically" linked Norris to a photo of a body being carried from the wreckage of the rail crash at Potters Bar, where Jarvis was supposed to be in charge of rail maintenance.

Not that the criticism has stopped the Lib Dems' attacks. They've now produced an internet computer game featuring an animated Norris climbing a graph depicting Jarvis's plummeting profits. Talk about poor taste.

SOME ordinary Lib Dem members are increasingly unhappy about the extra-curricular business activities of their colleagues in the Lords.

Two-and-a-half years ago the party passed a motion at conference banning their MPs and peers from working for lobbying firms to avoid accusations of conflicts of interest.

But not all their lordships took any notice. Lord Clement-Jones, the party's health spokesman, for example, is now pocketing £100,000 a year for running a successful lobbying firm for the City lawyers DLA. Thanks to new House of Lords' rules, he has to list his personal clients. And top of the list is the British food giant, AB Foods — purveyor of Silver Spoon sugar, which, no doubt, would be an obvious target for the "obesity tzar" that Clement-Jones, as health spokesman, wants the government to create.

Also on his list is the government of the Cayman Islands, the dependent territory best known as an offshore tax haven and its efforts to retain this status in the face of Gordon Brown's attempts to close various tax loopholes. (In the wake of Enron and other corporate scandals, even Clement-Jones's Lib Dem colleague, Lord William Wallace of Saltaire, wanted the government to tighten regulation of offshore centres.)

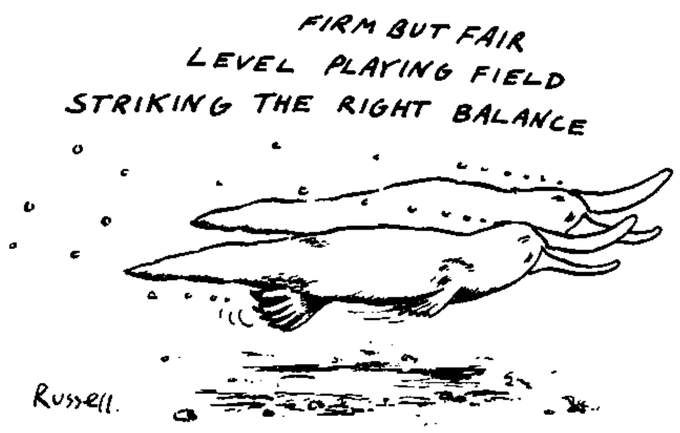
The other Lib Dem peer earning a crust from lobbying is Lord McNally, founder of public relations firm Shandwick, now Weber Shandwick UK. He earns £35,000 a year working in its lobbying division. According the most recent register of lords' interests, he works directly for three clients: the Corporation of London, the Crown Estate and the US cable firm NTL DoCoMo, whom he advises on "parliamentary contacts".

The Lib Dems must have forgotten that they once threatened to expel any of their politicians who lobbied for outside commercial interests.

DEEP embarrassment for Tory luvvie Ed Vaizey, who was more than usually full of himself following Margaret Thatcher's 25th anniversary dinner at the Savoy.

The wannabe MP strolled up to a group of party faithful and boomed: "I thought Michael Howard's speech was the best of the evening, didn't you?" Alas, no they didn't, detailing Howard's shortcomings: his address was pompous, too scripted and way over the top. Even true-blue Tories thought it had been absurd to compare Thatcher's battle against Arthur Scargill with Churchill's defiance against Nazi Germany.

Clearly the group had no idea Howard's speech had been written by Vaizey, who slunk away crestfallen.



Duckbill Platitudes

PEOPLE'S PEERS

THE latest batch of "people's peers" appointed to the House of Lords confirms again that the "best people" tend to be businessmen who give money to the Labour party.

The cronyism that saw **Paul Drayson** elevated to the Lords has been well reported (his Powderject firm also got a government vaccine contract after giving Labour £100,000); but he is not alone.

When new peer **Sandy Leitch** was chief executive of Zurich Financial he endlessly sucked up to the party too. His firm gave it money; he signed "businessmen for Labour" letters at election time; and he gave a top job at the firm to "new" Labour mouthpiece Wallace Dobbin.

In a grotesque display of sycophancy Zurich sponsored the Scottish Politician of the Year awards which, with Leitch and Dobbin among the judges, twice gave Gordon Brown a prize for being "best Scot at Westminster".

As the *Eye* pointed out in 2001, Leitch was desperate for an honour. But it is more likely to have been his toadying to Labour rather than his business skills that now see him rewarded. Leitch was chief executive of the Zurich subsidiary Allied Dunbar which had to compensate 100,000 pensioners cheated in the 1980s pensions con. The firm sold many useless "endowment mortgages" too; and Leitch served on Labour's New Deal task force, finding jobs for the unemployed, while his own firm was sacking people.

Meanwhile foreign secretary Jack Straw's businessman pal **Pat Carter** is now a peer too. Carter got rich founding and selling private hospital firm Westminster Healthcare. He has offered advice to Labour several times; and his recipe for improving prisons was, predictably, more privatisation.

Even loyal former Midlands Labour MP **Peter Snape** is, on closer inspection, another party-supporting businessman. At one point he chaired the bus firm Travel West Midlands and served on eight other subsidiaries of National Express, the private rail firm that also gives money to "new" Labour. Another businessman elevated to the Lords is **Dennis Tunnicliffe**, the former head of London Transport who started the tube PPP and got the Jubilee line to the dome on time — at fantastic expense.

Joining these ordinary business folk are a hard core of the party faithful: pollster **Philip Gould;** "new" Labour "intellectual" **Anthony Giddens**; political fixer **Margaret McDonagh**, and former Lord Irvine adviser **Gary Hart** (who is godfather to one of the prime minister's children).

PS: The Tories could have attacked Labour's cronyism... had they not themselves recommended millionaire donors like **Stanley Kalms** and **Leonard Steinberg** for the Lords.

PPS: The Lib Dems disappointed supporters who oppose Labour's privatisation drive by securing a peerage for **Iain Vallance**, one of the original "fat cats" whose chairman's salary at BT caused such shock in the 1990s. He is now vice-chairman of the PFI-friendly Royal Bank of Scotland.

CHARITY NEWS

TRADING standards officers around the country are warning people to watch out for two companies making door-to-door collections of clothing "donations".

GV Clothing and Olonex Ltd put leaflets through letterboxes, one of which reads: "Not everyone and especially young families can afford to buy new, often expensive clothes, shoes and household things." It is only in the small print at the bottom of the leaflet that it is explained that "all items collected will be distributed in eastern Europe at affordable prices".

Shropshire trading standards say the flyers give a misleading impression that the items are being collected for charitable purposes but "in reality, the collections seem to be organised by commercial operators who sell the donated items for profit."

The Advertising Standards Authority has ruled against Olonex, demanding that it withdraw a leaflet using the word "donate". Otherwise, trading standards say there is little they can do other than warn people, since the schemes are not illegal. Meanwhile, the Association of Charity Shops estimates that more than £1m a year is lost by good causes in items given away to similar set-ups by people who believe they are helping charity.

SAILING RUNS AGROUND

WELSH Harp Youth Sailing Base on Brent Reservoir, in north London, has been teaching children to sail and canoe since 1963. Several Olympic competitors started their sporting careers at the Barnet council facility which was used by 11,000 youngsters a year, many through their schools or summer schemes.

But not any longer. Last month Barnet council pulled the plug on the club. The closure will save Barnet £77,000 a year, but the main reason for it is that Metropolitan Housing Trust (MHT) is about to start a mammoth "mixed-tenure" development to revamp a council estate and add 1,500 new private properties on the banks of the reservoir.

The council says it plans to reopen the youth sailing base once the West Hendon Estate regeneration is finished in two years' time. But those involved with the base say that even if this does happen, it will be a tough job to start again from scratch, especially given how much of the centre's work is done by volunteers. Two of the three staff have already been issued with redundancy notices.

The loss of Welsh Harp leaves north London youngsters with little chance of learning to sail. The Lea Valley Watersports Centre on Banbury Reservoir in north-east London was closed last year by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority due to financial problems. Park bosses said it would cost too much to bring the tatty facilities up to scratch.

JUST three weeks before the official launch of the national offender management service (NOMS), MPs and even ministers seem unclear how the merged prison and probation service is to be run.

NOMS was announced in January (with no parliamentary scrutiny or consultation) on the back of a report by Jack Straw's best friend, the businessman Patrick Carter (see the People's Peers).

It apparently aims to improve "end-to-end" management of offenders, whether they are in jail or in the community. But no one has yet produced the business case for NOMS; nor detailed how the new agency will be structured; nor worked out how the two troubled prison and probation IT systems will link up. Probation and prison staff are also worried about senior appointments being made without the usual advertising or civil service board processes.

What has emerged from leaked documents seen by the *Eye* is that one of NOMS' early priorities will be more privatisation of prisons and services. It has drawn up plans to see if running jails may be more attractive to the private sector if they can buy them in clusters instead of individually (a trio of jails in the Redditch area are first up for sale.)

The probation union Napo is so concerned at the confusion and lack of transparency it has organised a lobby of parliament this week, which has even attracted support from senior Tories who believe the service should remain publicly funded and free from the threat of privatisation.

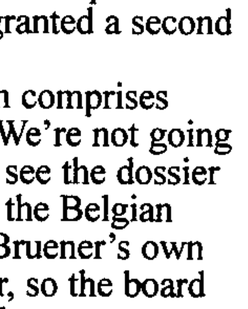
THE rebranding of disaster-prone Morrisons to AWG Facilities Services has done nothing to improve the running of the country's privatised bail hostels.

That old joke – how many AWG operators does it take to change a light fitting in a Devon probation hostel kitchen? – is still doing the rounds and the answer is three. (One came unsuccessfully from Weston-super-Mare and, finally, four days later two more came all the way from Sheffield.)

More seriously, some hostels in Staffordshire have been without fire and panic alert cover because AWG failed to renegotiate the contracts with those who monitor alarms. MPs, concerned at the continuing fiasco, asked the home office about the difference in costs for running the hostels before and after privatisation.

Home office minister Paul Goggins said that "no consistent data" was held when they were run and funded by the probation service, so he could not answer. But he should have asked the probation union, Napo, which obtained figures from each of the hostel managers. Since private operators took over, costs have risen 60 percent.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS



MORE on OLAF, Europe's magnificent anti-fraud department, and the row between its boss, the German magistrate Franz-Hermann Bruener, and his nemesis, *Stern* correspondent Hans-Martin Tillack.

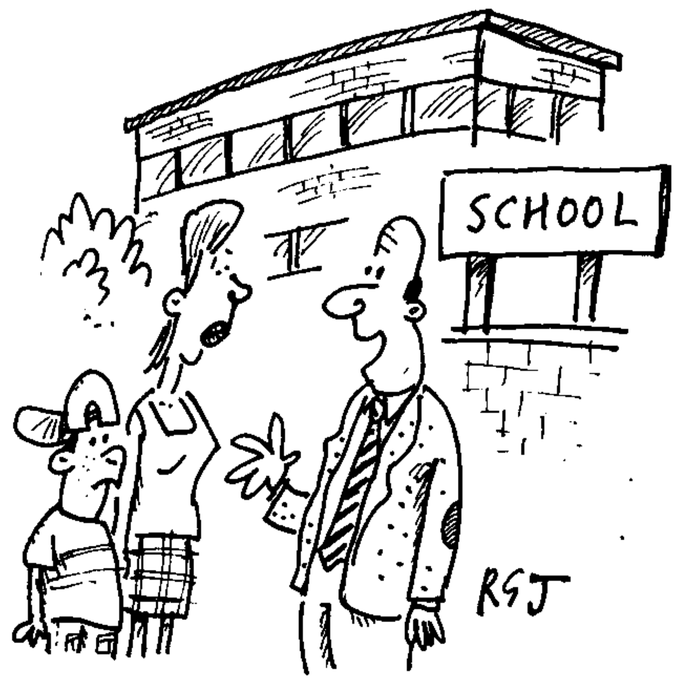
As readers will recall, Bruener had Tillack unceremoniously arrested in March. His crime? Being a first-rate investigative hack who had exposed European fraud and OLAF's pathetic inability to deal with it (fraud, OLAF admits, has actually *increased* over the last five years).

The problem for Bruener is that the evidence against Tillack – who was charged with bribing OLAF officials for documents – is based on a single Eurocrat's opinion. Confidential legal papers, seen by the *Eye*, show this beyond doubt. And no doubt the opinion of OLAF's advisory board – which was due to rule on Bruener's handling of the case as the *Eye* went to press – will be that that he is unfit to be granted a second term after the summer.

A source from the team, which comprises senior ex-coppers, told the *Eye*: "We're not going to take any nonsense. We want to see the dossier [on Tillack] which was handed to the Belgian judge." According to the source, Bruener's own department refused to hand it over, so the board had to get it from the judge directly.

Meanwhile, nearly three years after officials in commissioner Neil Kinnock's office first found out in detail about fraud in Eurostat, a little reported fact emerged from the European parliament in Strasbourg. While the world celebrated EU enlargement, MEPs were voting by 515 to 88 to make sure that, following the Eurostat case, no commissioner would ever be held accountable for corruption in his or her own department.

The vote essentially allows officials to continue their "vast enterprise of looting". One wonders why OLAF bothers to harass journalists when the elected politicians themselves refuse to criticise corruption even when they know about it.



"It's an excellent catchment area... none of the teachers can afford to live here"

ME TV

Saturday Night TV (All Channels)

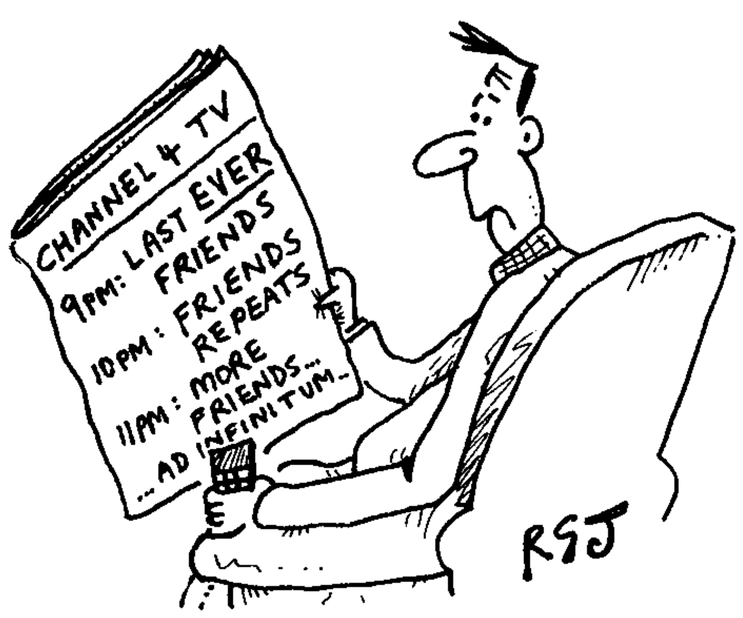
MICHAEL Parkinson says he's leaving the BBC for ITV because he was asked to play second fiddle to football. Some outside observers think it's because he saw that Jonathan Ross was the one in whom the BBC had put its faith for the future.

The true reason, though, is that Parkinson is almost 70 years old. The significance of his birth-date is not that he's determined to collect a final pension pay-day: it's that he's old enough to think that Saturday night is the one that still matters in television.

As Parky tells it, the BBC was forced by its new football contract to give his familiar 10pm-ish slot to the revived *Match of the Day*: bodies selling sports rights now routinely specify their slot as part of the deal. This meant that Parky either had to move an hour earlier on a Saturday or take a mid-week slot. This offended him because he insists that chat stars descending a catwalk is a late-night Saturday format. ITV, which stepped in to save him, supports this view.

Well, certainly when Parky started in the 70s, the dream of all TV presenters was to become Mr Saturday Night. Stars and shows such as *The Two Ronnies*, *Morecambe & Wise*, Parky and *Starsky & Hutch* owed their prominence to appearing in that sacred gap in the living room between shopping and washing the car or going to church. But, for at least 20 years, broadcasters have been forlornly trying to reproduce that viewing habit. In all that time, just a few shows — *Casualty*, *Stars In Their Eyes* and, briefly, *Blind Date* — have become Sabbath standbys. Huge numbers of other pretenders have tried and failed to revive the tradition: formats involving Bruce Forsyth, Lenny Henry, Ant & Dec and most recently Nicky Campbell (the execrable inter-active quiz show *Come And Have A Go... If You Think You're Smart Enough*) have come and flopped.

This isn't entirely the performers' fault. In common with all other areas of television,



there has been a loss of market-share through multichannel viewing: the digital channels, also schooled by old-fashioned telly thinking, often put their best stuff on a Saturday. Living habits have also inevitably changed. A revival over the last decade in cinema-going and the related explosion in video and DVD (Saturday night being the best night for rental shops) has increasingly made TV a secondary entertainment on that day.

So, gradually, Friday night (as Ross cleverly realised) and Sunday night have become the two crucial days of the TV weekend. Parkinson's own viewing figures since his return to the BBC demonstrate this well, slipping by at least two million in the last couple of years.

Accordingly, the BBC can give a Saturday chat-show to Desmond Lynam or Jeremy Vine (probably the two leading contenders) but they would be jumping into a leaking boat. Even the BBC's delight about returning football to Saturday nights is likely to end unhappily.

As ITV discovered with *The Premiership*, the problem with soccer is that it has vast symbolic value as a political football between broadcasters but rarely delivers in ratings terms outside of major international tournaments involving England. The core football audience is only about four million which, for the money involved, is nothing.

The problem is that even the cleverest executives and media editors become obsessed with recreating the TV schedules of their childhood. So *Match of the Day* returning to BBC on Saturday nights is said to be "back in its natural home". Parky, going to ITV at 10-ish on Saturdays, feels he's got "his" slot back.

But Parky and BBC and ITV executives are all guilty of old-fashioned thinking. They're making the assumption that the middle day of the weekend can again become the key day of the ratings, if only the right formula can be found. The smarter view would be that the achievements of *The Two Ronnies* and *Starsky & Hutch* are like verbatim parliamentary reporting in newspapers and large crowds at county cricket matches: nice for the people who had them but impossible to recreate in the current culture.

In the 1970s, millions of people used to watch revolutionary socialist dramas every Tuesday night in *Play For Today* — but that isn't going to happen again either. Chasing the shadows of past Saturday nights is not only futile but misunderstands the fluid nature of TV as a medium.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What is the round implement believed to have been invented around 4,000 years ago and used in transport ever since?

Contestant: The steam engine.

AR: Cantonese and Mandarin are two languages that originated in which oriental country?

Contestant: Spain.

AR: Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire first appeared together in the film "Flying Down To..." where?

Contestant: Halifax.

AR: What is the commonest surname in the United Kingdom?

Contestant: Patel.

MEDIA NEWS

"MARK BYFORD thinks it's time to take on board the notion of the 'public value' created by the BBC," says the Beeb's in-house journal *Ariel*. Few would disagree — but what does Byford mean?

He told a Voice of the Listener conference that he wants to see "eye witness reporting" and "serious analysis" — both a feature of BBC news already, surely. In addition he believes "the power of TV, radio and the internet can also be used by the corporation to help people learn". He can't have seen any of the thousands of hours of Open University programmes available on the BBC.

This evangelism for "public value" (marketing-speak for public *service* broadcasting) is in fact designed to achieve two goals: charter renewal and the appointment of one Mark Byford as full-time director-general. The rest is spin.

IF YOU think people who call phone-in shows are all genuine, independent voices, think again.

BBC Radio Five Live has sent a questionnaire to 50 or so people who took part in its recent birthday celebrations. It asks them about future availability and a list of topics about which they'd be happy to rant, including politics, health, religion, travel and foreign affairs.

It also asks them to list "any areas of expertise they'd be happy to share with us". Once vetted, their names will go into the main contact system. And as a note to producers says: "Please don't forget they are there and if you're looking for real people to take part in programmes think of them first... At the moment you may still have to cold call as we have limited information about the families but NOT for long."

HOW CLEAN IS YOUR HOUSE?
WHERE KIM WOODBURN & AGGIE MACKENZIE..
TURN UP AT A PLACE WHERE DIRT HAS GOT OUT OF CONTROL
AND GET THEIR OWN SERIES!
CHANNEL 4
HORSEFERRY ROAD SW1
Porn Porn Porn
SCHEDULES more Sex tips for Girls. Sex on TV. Flashers Uncovered
Bronx Bunny Show
Ken Pyne

HOW BBC DISCIPLINE WORKS 1:

1986: BBC announces that Leslie Grantham's conviction for murder is a "private matter".

2004: BBC forces Leslie Grantham to make public apology for "deplorable action" of masturbating in dressing room.

LUVVIES

He [Christopher Eccleston] sees *Doctor Who* as a prism from which to view the political history of post-war Britain. "I'm interested in the times it came from, and *Doctor Who* emerged when Wilson was talking about the 'white heat of technology' as the industrial revolution in Britain reached its great apex."

Interview in The Times

Submitted by Steven Devine

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"Early conceptualists, apparently"

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

TEN questions for home secretary David Blunkett about his proposed new biometric identity cards.

If, as seems likely, fingerprints are the chosen biometric, how will they be read? At airports, fingerprint scanners are feasible; but what about at ferry ports and the Channel tunnel? Imagine the queues if every car exiting every ferry has to disgorge its occupants who then have to queue to have their fingers read. And what about Eurostar trains?

How will a UK national biometric ID card scheme protect us against al Qaeda members travelling on, say, legitimate Algerian passports or members of the Real IRA with Irish passports? Biometric ID systems would have stopped neither the Twin Towers attacks nor the bombs in Madrid.

How will the home office establish an applicant's true identity before issuing a new, "foolproof" ID card?

If the answer to question 3) is "by showing an existing form of ID, such as a passport", how will the home office avoid falling for existing bogus IDs?

Who is going to pay for all this and where does the home office figure of £3.1bn come from? The answer to the first question is "you are" and to the second, "out of thin air".

Who will have access to the data stored on the card and, for that matter, *what* information will be stored?

What will people with no fingers do at border crossings or, if iris-scanning is used, what will people with glass eyes do?

The government has a pisspoor record on hi-tech forms of ID. Consider the ridiculous, two-part driving licence. The only reason we have to have a sheet of paper as well as a card is because Whitehall, under previous management, was too stupid and parsimonious to do the job properly and incorporate the information on a magnetic strip. If the government finds the technology of a supermarket loyalty card daunting, what chance has it with complex and sophisticated biometric ID cards?

Will Crapita be involved?

'Boffin'

LABOUR ADMEN REVISIT "BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY"

AD NAUSEAM

TO DUBLIN to hear none other than TBWA's Trevor Beattie pronounce on the state of the advertising industry.

Adland's most luminous gob did not disappoint, delivering an impassioned diatribe against idle creatives and pisspoor advertising. Particular bile was reserved for car advertising, which he branded worst offender for shoddy, "will this do" work.

Could clever Trevor have been referring to last year's campaign for the new Nissan Micra, which slung together words to create lame neologisms ("compacious", "spafe") before asking: "Do You Speak Micra?" An idea so lame it could only be salvaged by paying David Lynch to direct the TV spots? The Micra ads were, of course, made by Beattie's TBWA.

And on the subject of idle creatives, haven't we seen a TBWA campaign reliant upon easy wordplay before? Of course we fcuking have.

THE SLEW of elections on 10 June brings with it a new round of political advertising. All eyes are on the Tories in particular, with the party faithful hoping that M'Lord Saatchi can bring some adland acumen to the table and give them another "Labour Isn't Working", especially now Labour has launched its campaign with "Britain is Working" – a typically Blairite assertion that blithely disregards the facts.

The signs are, however, that Maurice may have lost his touch. The Tories' campaign slogan, created by M&C Saatchi alongside VCCP, was announced last week. It was, drum roll please… "Let Down By Labour". Not a million miles away from "Labour Isn't Working", several distinctly underwhelmed passers-by noted, and already countermanded by Labour's campaign.

Perhaps it's for this reason the Tories have signalled their faith in the enduring creativity of Lord Saatchi by… asking someone, anyone, to come up with something better. Their "Let Down By Labour" website invites the general public to submit ideas for films, posters and press campaigns, with the best entries to be used in forthcoming campaigns.

WHEN sportswear brand Adidas sponsored a series of "sports training days" in Edinburgh schools, youngsters in the city decided enough was enough.

The events were attended by an "Adidas Man" kitted out in the latest sports gear and there was even a photographer provided to take photos of kids in the borrowed branded gear as a souvenir of their day. One of the most effective advertising wheezes ever, you might think.

However, the students were not so naïve and have now teamed up with anti-sweatshop organisation No Sweat and the Scottish Parents Teachers' Council to start a campaign to "ban the brands" from schools. They have also produced pamphlets and are running information stalls about the sweatshop labour and human rights abuses in Far Eastern sub-contracted factories working for the big sportswear brands.

A Scotland-wide petition has been launched and No Sweat says Edinburgh council has promised a review of its guidelines on business sponsorship within education.

Own goal, Adidas.

RIVERSIDE Studios in Hammersmith has chickened out of displaying an art exhibition about Coca-Cola's links to Nazi Germany.

The arts centre, close to Coke's Hammersmith-based UK HQ, initially agreed to the planned show which focuses on Coca-Cola's Nazi-friendly advertising in Germany in the 1930s, including its sponsorship of the 1936 Olympics and the invention of Fanta specifically for the Nazi market. The event was planned by campaigning comedian Mark Thomas, who has been gathering material to highlight Coke's connections to more recent human rights abuses around the world.

The art show, which includes work by school children as well as dozens of artists, will now open at the Nancy Victor Gallery in Charlotte Street. The *Eye* tried to get a response from Riverside but no one returned our calls.

"She's in a lovely costume. It's a big green dress, and you can clearly see her in the court scene. As the actors walk forward, you can see her behind."

Scarborough Evening News

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

NAOMI WINS CASE...
IF I CAN TAKE ONE NEWSPAPER TO COURT FOR SPLASHING ME ALL OVER THEIR PAGES...
...THEN I GET EVERY NEWSPAPER SPLASHING ME ALL OVER THEIR PAGES!!!
HEH HEH!
NAOMI NAOMI NAOMI
NAOMI
NAOMI WINS!
NAOMI

SIGNAL FAILURES

Isn't one clever?

THE East Anglia rail franchise's new name, one, cleverly brings together the privatised railway's priorities: satisfying shareholders and bureaucrats. It means "operated by National Express" (*geddit?*) and celebrates the "strategic" rail authority's triumph in merging 2.5 franchises that had been separate since 1996.

It matters little to commuters from Chelmsford who owns the franchise or that Chingford commuters have the same train operator. What passengers do want is clear information. But will they get it?

As if there weren't enough figures around already (departure times, platform numbers, seat numbers, etc), now one has been thrown into the mix passengers can look forward to tannoy announcements about the "9.40 one service" (does the train leave at 9.41?) and "the one Anglia train to Ipswich" (which may be one of dozens that day). Some passengers might think a train with one written on every carriage is first-class only. And omission of a capital O ensures continuity of confusion in written notices in a language where one can mean I, we or you. There's also scope for mix-ups in internal communications, where "one trains" or "one passengers" spoken over radios or phones could be taken in the singular and where each train has an identification code starting with a single numeral.

VIRGIN Trains is getting excited now it has new trains on half its services on the west-coast mainline (having promised them on all services by the end of 2002). In the staff newspaper *Railnews*, chief executive Chris Green gushed: "Without Virgin's vision, the modernisation of the west coast would never have got started, the new trains would have remained on the drawing board and CrossCountry could only have dreamed of acquiring a £1bn fleet of new trains."

He must think everyone has forgotten that Virgin's business plans have been disastrous and had to be scaled back. Rescuing the west-coast mainline and its inter-city service from the hare-brained Virgin-Railtrack plan (*Eyes passim*) is costing so much that other mainline upgrades are cancelled, as are grant funds for small investments and rail-freight terminals. Modernising the west-coast service was central to the franchise let in the 1990s; without Virgin's hallucination the job would have gone to a bidder who promised less and would have delivered a similar outcome to Virgin at lower cost.

CrossCountry's intrusive new timetable in 2002 caused huge disruption by doubling services through Britain's worst bottleneck, Birmingham New Street. CrossCountry and other services were hacked about again, causing more bad publicity and confusion. The new trains cost £390m, not £1bn, and were the wrong decision anyway. BR and its predecessors understood CrossCountry was a loss maker and normally used hand-me-downs from mainlines to minimise costs. Thanks to "Virgin's vision", taxpayers now give DrossCountry millions in unplanned subsidy as revenue falls far short of charges for the cramped new trains and other operating costs. If Virgin hadn't arrogantly discarded the wisdom of generations of earlier managers, CrossCountry passengers would now ride in comfortable, spacious trains displaced from the west-coast line.

A KEY target in "new" Labour's 10-year transport plan was an 80 percent increase in rail freight, to help cut lorry traffic.

Less than four years later the policy has been wrecked because "new" Labour has axed grants for rail-freight terminals, introduced heavier lorries, scuppered a planned freight railway through England, ordered major road schemes and diluted the European working time directive for truckers. And it did nothing while state-owned Royal Mail scrapped the contract for postal trains.

So English, Welsh and Scottish, Britain's biggest rail-freight company, is now such a nuisance to its owner, Canadian National, that CN has cancelled "the maximum allowable number of shares" in EWS. That will transfer £82m from EWS to CN – money that might have helped Britain towards the 80 percent target had "new" Labour shown a little commitment to its own promise.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

Patient forums

IT'S 13 months since Lord Hunt of Kings Heath resigned as junior health minister over Iraq, citing his "two-year battle to get rid of community health councils (CHCs)" as one of his greater achievements.

He was convinced a "big bang reform" was needed and trumpeted the creation of new patient involvement forums (PIFs). But his promise that CHCs wouldn't go until the forums were fully functional has proved an absurd miscalculation. CHCs in England were shut down last December; but the £39m ploughed into the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) in its first year to oversee the setting up of the new forums has achieved, according to one insider, "nothing but the barest structure".

A senior source at the department of health recently registered dismay at how little the CPPIH has delivered for its money. According to commission chair Sharon Grant, its role is "to give the patient forums the tools and information they need" and "to make proper arrangements for the forums to do their jobs properly".

Alas, a recent survey by the *Health Service Journal* (8 April) found that many forums are "struggling to survive due to lack of resources and poor administrative support". Even worse, "forums are hidden from the public they were set up to serve because the CPPIH and its forum support organisations (sic) have refused to make membership lists public". And most forums were so desperate for members that the only selection criteria was "if you turn up, you're in".

The DoH is so worried about the performance of forums it has delayed plans to give them responsibility for the Independent Complaints Advisory Service; and there is little evidence of 575 forums in England achieving their statutory duty to monitor NHS trusts on behalf of patients. As with the Patient Advocacy Liaison Services, there is a real worry that forums can't achieve independence when they are so closely aligned to the trusts they are supposed to monitor.

As one *Eye* reader and forum member puts it: "We have been subject to a flood of verbiage from the commission: welcome day notes, minutes, consultations, guidance, diversity surveys, 'Take time for Health'... [But] we cannot visit anywhere in our official capacity as we still do not have our identity cards. The commission and support organisation appears to be run by second-rate civil servants who are perforce making it up as they go along.

"Our forum is a group of excellent people but we have achieved nothing. It is possible that we might come up with some idea for improvement, champion some worthy cause, but cash is still too tight. We should be helping the PCT to save money but that is hard work and properly the expertise of the modernisation people to whom we don't at the moment have access... We are just another impediment to the efficient running of the local NHS, not really an asset. Just another attention catching idea that is immensely difficult to make work."

Despite its disastrous start the CPPIH has been promised another £33m this year. But who is accountable for it? Allegations abound that Sharon Grant was only given the commission chair after she failed to win the Labour nomination for her late husband's Tottenham seat and the victor, junior health minister David Lammy, wanted to reward her. In her acceptance speech Grant echoed Lord Hunt in wanting to make the commission "the uncompromised voice of the patient heard at every level of the NHS". A year on and the silence is deafening.

Meanwhile Hunt, now chair of the National Patient Safety Agency, has launched a National Reporting and Learning System for medical errors, and will pilot it in Wales – with the help of the few community health councils he was unable to abolish. Apparently the new English forums aren't up to the task.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

DOCTOR, I'VE BEEN SO IMPRESSED WITH THE CARE I'VE RECEIVED...
I'VE BEEN INSPIRED TO WORK IN A HOSPITAL MYSELF
HMMM....
JUST AS I THOUGHT- YOU'RE ON FAR TOO MUCH MEDICATION

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

CORDEN BLUE

HATS OFF to Doncaster's mayor, Martin Winter, who has introduced 50 "community safety wardens" to patrol the streets of the Beacon of Sleaze.

Duties range from reporting graffiti and litter to "having a quiet word" with youngsters involved in vandalism or street drinking. In cases of persistent or marked anti-social behaviour, they can issue reports to help the police and courts decide whether to issue an anti-social behaviour order (Asbo), which if breached can lead to imprisonment.

Such a report was issued last month by wardens who were subjected to an unprovoked aggressive rant in the street. "It was the worst example of threatening anti-social behaviour I have witnessed," one of those on the receiving end, safety warden Paul Boardman, told the *Eye*. Unfortunately for the mayor, the aggressor happened to be one of his Labour councillors, Tony Corden.

When warden Boardman and his colleague Barbara Hall saw Cllr Corden approaching them they expected some awkwardness, for they had recently complained about Corden having used photographs of the wardens in a "party political" way in a Labour newsletter — the wardens insisting that to maintain community trust they must not be identified with any political party.

"Cllr Corden asked us what we were doing and why we had not reported to him the details of jobs so far carried out," said Boardman. He replied that some matters were confidential, but everything was reported to their manager. Corden "insisted that he had a right to know all the details because we worked for him, as the local councillor".

When Boardman said the wardens were not directly answerable to individual councillors, he alleges that Corden became "very aggressive... he walked up to me as close as he could get and started shouting very loudly. It was very difficult to tell what he was saying. His face was about an inch away from mine."

Boardman says he feared an assault and backed away, leaving the councillor continuing to shout after him. The wardens decided that had they encountered such aggression from anyone else, they would have filed an "antisocial behaviour" report, so that is what they did. This being Doncaster, however, nothing has happened, other than that the wardens have been told by managers to keep their mouths shut. Boardman says: "There should not be one rule for councillors and another for everyone else". He has therefore reported Corden to the Standards Board for England.

Cllr Corden tells the *Eye*: "I deny these allegations. I am confident that any independent inquiry will clear me."

BUDE AWAKENING

WITH summer approaching North Cornwall district council (NCDC) has infuriated locals and visitors to Bude by closing its popular "sea pool" at Summerleaze beach. The pool has offered sheltered seawater bathing for more than 70 years during which time only one person has drowned (after being swept away while trying to walk round the sea wall at high tide).

Reading council leader David Sutton (left) spells out Labour's message with Reading East parliamentary candidate Tony Page and the council's educashun supremo, Jo Lovelock

NCDC has closed the pool on the advice of the health and safety executive, which deems it dangerous because, er, seawater is cloudy so you can't always see the bottom, which is covered with uneven rocks and slippery seaweed. The council says it has a "duty of care" and fears legal action were an accident to happen. Hundreds of people have posted messages of protest on the council's website. Many point out that closing the "dangerous" pool will result in more children bathing in the sea — which as well as murky water, rocks and seaweed, has enormous waves and strong currents here.

A council spokeswoman told the *Eye* the pool would reopen for the bank holiday and half-term, while a council meeting on 10 May was due to discuss its long-term future. "All our time and effort is going into trying to find a way to open the pool for the summer and finding solutions to keep it open in the long term," she said.

SEALE CLUBBING

"WE HAVE found no evidence of fraud," said Oxfordshire social services director Charles Waddicor last week, following the suspension on full pay of three of the county's finance officers.

Unfortunately Mr Waddicor and colleagues cannot find any evidence, either, of some £1m still unaccounted for after the discovery of a £11m hole in the social services budget. The district auditor is refusing to sign off the department's accounts — a total of around £200m — until the mess is sorted out.

Taxpayers have not been impressed by Oxfordshire's "easy come, easy go" attitude since the revelation in March that £1m had built up in a "missing" bank account at the same time that savage budget cuts were taking place, including the closure of respite centres for disabled children. The council (a Tory-Lib Dem coalition) was, however, able to find £400,000 to refurbish county hall, including a new members' lounge.

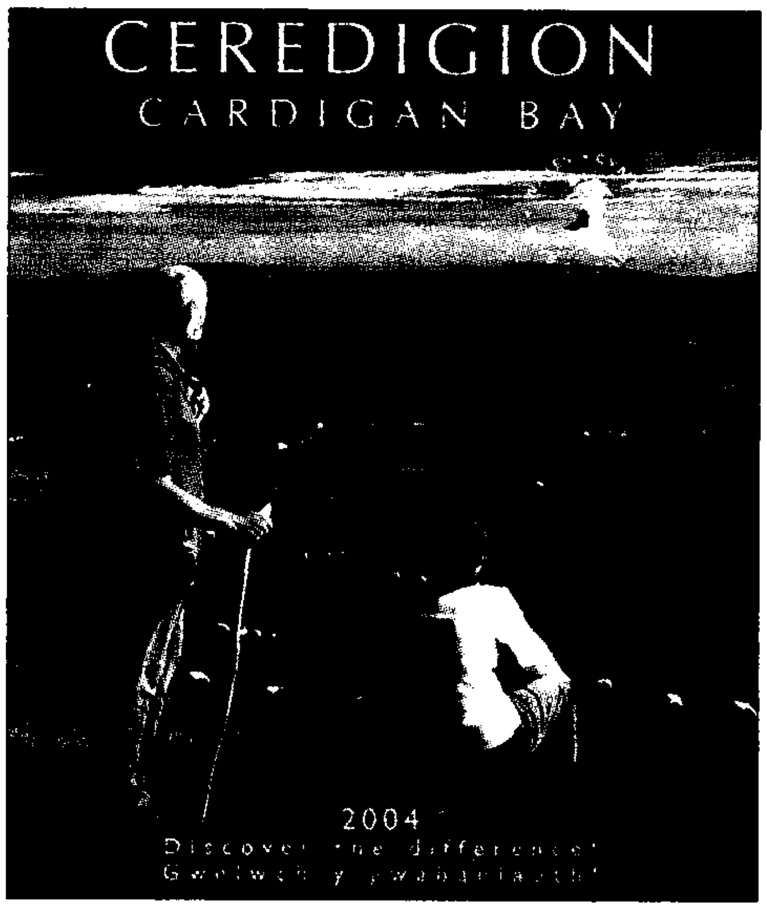
Fortunately Tory councillor Don Seale, "executive member for social and health care", was able to put things in perspective. He told angry parents of disabled children: "Most of the people in the county are not old and most of them do not have disabled children... Most [make] the minimum of fuss." Who says we never hear about "compassionate Conservatism" these days?

BY HOOK OR BY ROOKER

HOUSING minister Jeff Rooker pronounced himself "delighted" that councils across the country have met the target that no family with children now live in bed and breakfast hostels for more than six weeks. (It became illegal for housing services to place homeless families in B&Bs long-term on 31 March.)

"Around 5,700 children have been helped out of unsuitable B&B in the last year alone and now have a brighter future," announced the office of the deputy prime minister.

However, children's charity Barnardo's has looked behind the sleight-of-hand and reckons that the new regime still leaves up to 9,000 families with children in B&B-type lodgings. It points out that the government's narrow definitions exclude any family housed through social services, rather than through a housing department, or housed by the national asylum support service — exactly the people most likely to end up in such accommodation. The new dispensation also only applies to families in private sector housing. Local authority or housing association hostels can be just as grotty, with families crammed into single rooms, no kitchens and shared bathrooms. According to homelessness charity Shelter, 95,000 households are in temporary accommodation — a 13.4 percent increase in the past year.



ILL WIND

SO PROUD of the stunning scenery of Cefn Croes is Ceredigion County Council that it chose to promote the Cambrian highlands on the cover of its 2004 tourism brochure *(see above)*. Shame then that next year, and thanks to the council which, as Eye readers will remember, did not oppose the scheme and passed up the right to an automatic public enquiry, 39 wind-power turbines will blot the very same landscape.

"Discover the difference!" the brochure advises. It will be hard not to once the huge wind farm is complete.

● A DELICIOUS Clinton-style "I didn't inhale" moment in Lincolnshire, where Tory county council leader Ian Croft has received a four-page letter from his jailed predecessor Jim Speechley (*Eyes passim*). After Labour opposition leader Rob Parker claimed the letter was "an attempt to direct the running of the council from a prison cell" and demanded to know its contents, an embarrassed Croft said: "I didn't study the contents... I took it straight to the monitoring officer. I may have glanced at it. I can't recollect at all what it said. But I decided I didn't want to read it." Yeees, right. As the *Eye* went to press the hapless Croft was still leader — but he is likely to be put out of his misery soon.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER

WE CERTAINLY ADMIRE THE FACT THAT YOU ARE ENCOURAGING BIRDS TO NEST IN YOUR GARDEN, GENTLEMEN...
AND WE'RE VERY IMPRESSED BY THE WAY IN WHICH YOU'VE TRIED TO CREATE THE RIGHT HABITAT...
IT'S JUST THAT YOUR ATTEMPT TO ATTRACT THE GREAT CRESTED MONGOLIAN HERON IS SERIOUSLY DISRUPTING AIR TRAFFIC
RSPB
RSPB

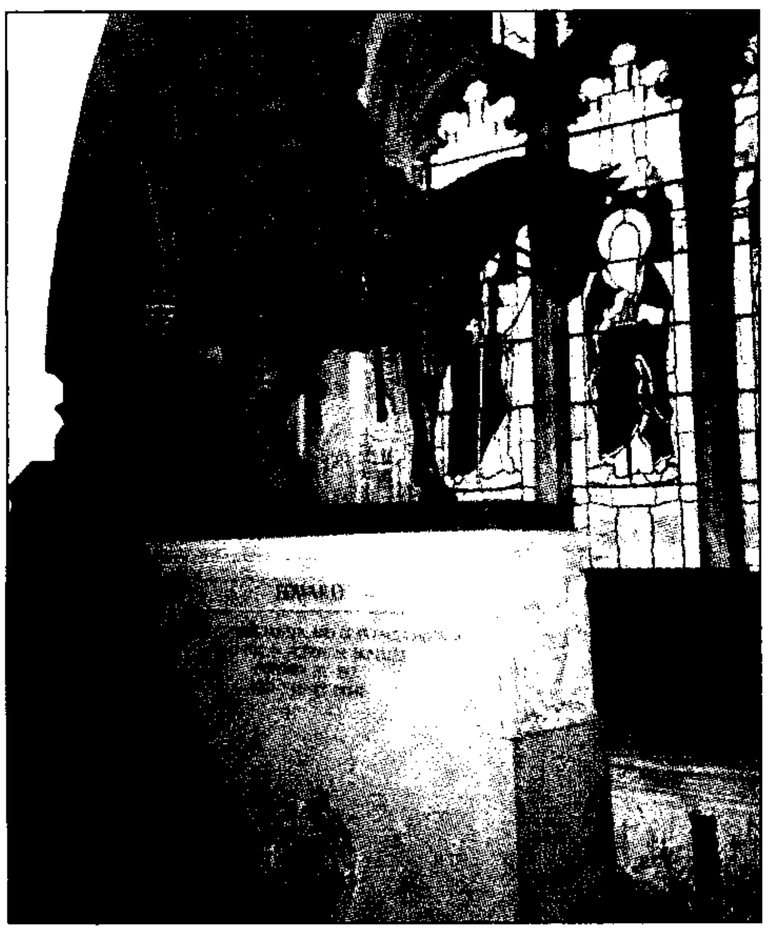
NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE gratuitous, destructive meddling by the Church of England – this time in Mells, a charming village near Frome in Somerset, where the parish church council wants to remove the equestrian memorial to Edward Horner from the Horner Chapel at the east end of the north aisle to a new position.

This is to enable the chapel to be glazed in to make it into a quiet area for prayer, meetings and small services – all activities which can take place elsewhere in the church without introducing obtrusive plate glass in a medieval building.

What makes the proposal even more objectionable is that Mells is no ordinary village and the Horner Memorial no ordinary family memorial. The Horners lived in Mells for centuries. Captain Edward Horner was the last of the male line and was killed at Noyelles in 1917 during the Battle of Cambrai. The family commissioned a memorial, which is a poignant and beautiful thing and the glory of the church: a bronze statue of Horner on horseback by the painter Alfred Munnings.

The plinth on which it rests was designed by the great Edwin Lutyens, designer of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, who was a friend of the



family. Lutyens also rebuilt Mells Manor after a fire, worked at Mells Manor, the home of the Horners, designed the gravestone of Reginald McKenna, politician and banker, in the churchyard and was responsible for the superb war memorial in the village.

Mells, in fact, is suffused with the tragedy of the First World War. Under the tower is an inscription cut by Eric Gill to the memory of Horner's brother in law, Raymond Asquith, the son of the prime minister, who was also killed on the Western Front in France; while in the churchyard is the grave of the great, brave, angry war poet, Siegfried Sassoon.

It may be a good thing that the aristocratic Edwardian world that could send so many young men off to die to so little point has come to an end; but that is no reason to spoil the Horner Chapel, which is both a work of art and a monument to something momentous in our shared history. As elsewhere, the various war memorials in Mells – both personal and collective – matter as they have much to teach us about the past, about war and the terrible things human beings can do to each other. For these reasons we might have hoped the Rector of Mells and his parishioners would have regarded the Horner Memorial with more respect and humility. It should be left alone.

WE ARE all greatly looking forward to publication of the government's audit on CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), inspired by the revelation in this column on the connections between that organisation (chairman Sir Stuart Lipton) and the patronage of the developers Stanhope plc (chairman Sir Stuart Lipton – see Eye 1094).

Meanwhile it is exciting to learn about the recent launch of Design East Lancashire, "a new regional body set up by CABE to help place high quality design at the centre of the region's renaissance". The chairman of CABE (Sir Stuart Lipton) said on that occasion: "In essence, Design East Lancashire is the first real test of CABE's power to 'Transform Neighbourhoods'."

In this context, it was interesting to read on the front page of Property Week on 30 April that: "Stanhope teams up with giant fund and former EP executives to capitalise on Prescott dream... ING Real Estate and Stanhope have teamed up with two former executives from English Partnerships to form a development fund aiming to capitalise on Labour's new regeneration initiative the Northern Way."

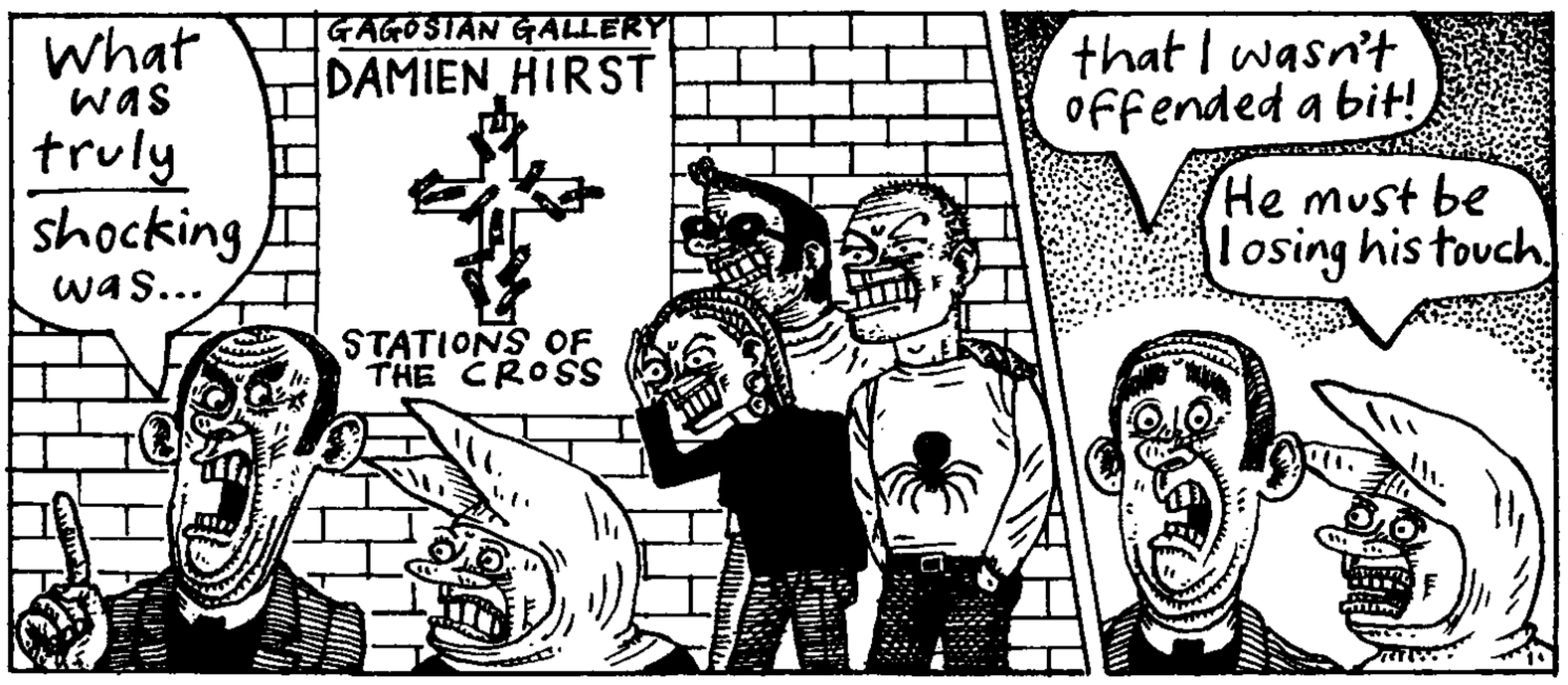
This is called Cibitas Investments. And in case you had forgotten, "Prescott's 'Northern Way' initiative, launched in February, forms a key part of the government's £22bn Sustainable Communities plan, and is intended to catalyse the revival of a huge stretch of northern England... Cibitas will focus much of its efforts on securing and developing sites close to city centres... These funds see the potential in higher returns from regeneration, which, while risky, is also likely to be more rewarding than buying standard city centre investment property let on secure long leases. The involvement of Stanhope is also seen as crucial. The company is recognised as Britain's leading developer..."

Who could disagree with that?

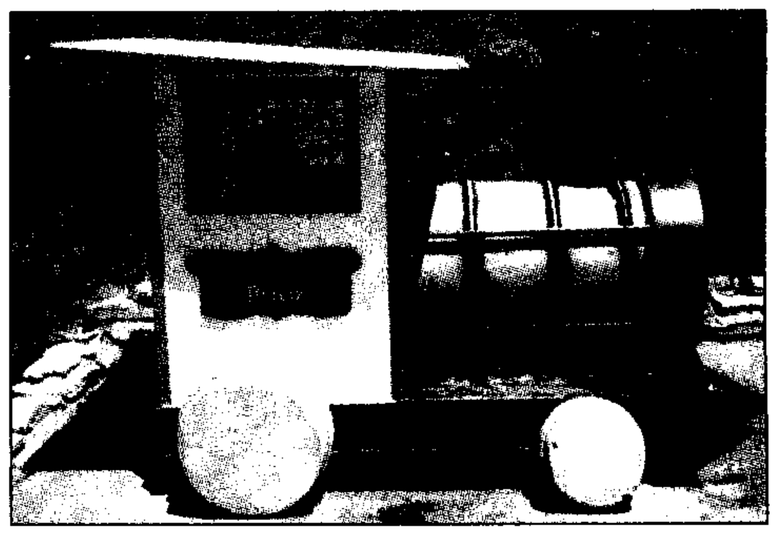
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


What was truly shocking was...
GAGOSIAN GALLERY
DAMIEN HIRST
STATIONS OF THE CROSS
that I wasn't offended a bit!
He must be losing his touch.

I-SPY *Fort Wayne, Indiana*



Submitted by Rina Tillinger. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

HAS anti-American feeling infected the world of conducting?

The unpopularity of Leonard Slatkin at the BBCSO has been chronicled before in this column and isn't getting any better, which is why he must be grateful that the new Proms season — just announced — will be his last: an end to several years of players' jibes about everything from his professional inadequacy to his sexual prowess and the possibility (much-discussed) of some causal relationship between the two.

As he prepares to exit, though, another New World maestro has stepped up to share the punishment. The principal conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Gerard Schwarz, has received a vote of no-confidence from his players, who convened without official sanction from management and agreed by overwhelming majority that his contract should not be renewed.

Having told Schwarz of their verdict, the players have been strangely vague about their reasons, however. Schwarz's musical abilities don't seem to be in question: just his choice of repertoire, which has been criticised for including "obscure American composers" in repeated programmes that failed to pull big audiences.

Oddly, the past three years of Schwarz's tenure have seen audience figures actually *rise* by 40 percent and group sales by 57 percent. And composers like Bernstein and Copland are hardly obscure (although they are, of course, American).

When the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the newspaper of Schwarz's hometown, reported the matter the other day, it quoted an experienced arts administrator regretting that while "Americans tend to think European conductors are glamorous, the reverse isn't true". Earlier this year in Britain, the *Telegraph* expressed concerns about Liverpool's role as European Capital of Culture in 2008 and complained of the city's need for new born-and-bred cultural heroes. The Beatles were gone; Simon Rattle, although born a Scouser, was allied with Birmingham; and who (the piece continued) was the chief conductor of the Liverpool Phil? An American.

Of course the Liverpool Phil *could* have had local boy Rattle for its hero, but it lost the chance. Years ago, before he was famous, the management wanted to offer him the chief conductorship but the players voted no.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

ORGAN GRINDER

Musician Elex Pentorn was rescued after ten days trapped under his organ in Sandusky, Ohio.

The Sun

Whistle Down The Wind
Andrew Lloyd Webber' shit musical Mon-Sat eves 7.30pm.
Wed & Sat mats 2.30pm

Thames Valley listings magazine

A Fishy Royal Story

NOT generally known to be the number one fan of the European Union, Prince Charles may well be royally displeased when he learns how cynically he has been duped by New Labour ministers *into promoting* a highly contentious scheme intended to tighten still further Brussels's grip over Britain's fishing industry.

In Plymouth on 29 April the prince made an impassioned speech to launch an initiative known as "Invest In Fish", supported by, among others, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Marks and Spencer. Sitting beside him, beaming with approval, was fisheries minister Ben Bradshaw.

On the face of it this is a scheme supported by Cornwall county council on behalf of local fishermen, designed to increase the "sustainability" of fish stocks in the seas around Cornwall and Devon. Its environmentally-correct purpose, warmly endorsed by the prince, is to create "highly protected marine areas", allowing fish to breed undisturbed.

But Invest In Fish is not what it seems. It is not a new initiative, nor is it British. Originally known as "COBAS" (for Cost Basis Analysis for Sustainability), it has been worked up over two years, part-funded by money given to Cornwall by Brussels under its "Objective One" help for deprived areas, as a template for the European commission's grand plan to impose total control over the EU's fishing waters.

The commission's strategy is based on a blatant confidence trick. Its outward pretence is that it will set up "regional advisory councils" (RACs), purporting to represent fishermen, environmentalists and other "stakeholders" in fisheries. These are given ostentatious support by organisations such as the WWF (which receives lavish Brussels funding). But in reality the RACs are intended to be no more than front organisations, set up to carry out policy dictated from Brussels by the commission and its new "fisheries management committee".

These councils, of which the one set up for the waters around south-west England is intended to be the prototype, must by definition include representatives of several countries (that for the south-west will include members from France, Spain and Ireland). Funded under the "Interreg" programme, designed to link the regions of neighbouring countries, their real purpose has nothing to do with conservation. It is simply to promote integration, by locking in national fishing industries on a cross-border "European" basis (what is known in Eurospeak as "perforated sovereignty").

All this has been cleverly hidden from the view not just of most fishermen, but also, it seems, that of Prince Charles, whose speech, carefully guided by Bradshaw's officials, made no mention of the "European dimension". Even odder was the fact that, only four days after the prince was gulled into endorsing this controversial initiative, the Tory leader Michael Howard also visited Plymouth, at the start of the Euro-parliamentary election campaign, to reaffirm his pledge that, if he ever forms a government, a top priority will be to repatriate control of fisheries policy from Brussels.

Whether or not this is likely to happen, Tory policy thus stands four-square against all "Invest In Fish" has been set up to achieve. So the prince's speech represented game, set and match for Bradshaw. He had lured an unsuspecting Charles right into the cockpit of party politics, in giving royal endorsement to a policy supported by Labour (and Brussels) and diametrically opposed to that of the Tories. It was hardly surprising Bradshaw looked so pleased with himself.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Private Eye

Guarded response

Sir,

Far from being shocked by the amount of time the recruits at Deepcut Barracks were/are spending on guard duty, I would be deeply disturbed to think that any member of our most excellent armed forces (of whatever age) was NOT capable of spending 12 hours a day, seven days a week on guard duty at a UK base within the UK, where there is little, if anything, against which to stand guard. If they can't handle hanging around doing nothing much for 12 hours, how will they ever cope with something a bit more stressful, like, say, a war?

An acquaintance of mine worked as a scaffolder on the Second Severn Crossing. For a period of almost two entire years he worked a 12-hour daily shift, seven days a week, with no time off.

Somehow he and his c.4,000 co-workers (many of whom were 17 or 18 years old) managed to put in 12 hours of hard labour each day in potentially dangerous conditions, with their work often involving considerable "isolation and bullying" (large building sites aren't the best places for wimps who can't stand up for themselves), without resorting to killing themselves or each other due to boredom or frustration.

Yours, wondering if you've been a bit short of things to write about recently,
ELEANOR STANOJEVIC,

Via email.

Belgo farrago

Sir,

I grow weary of seeing Luke Johnson credited with founding Belgo (Media News, 1100). The first Belgo was the creation of Denis Blaye and André Plisnier and opened in Chalk Farm in April 1992, to be followed later by Belgo Centraal in Covent Garden. Only much later, were those two very successful establishments acquired by Johnson and backed into a shell company, floated early in 1998.

DERRICK SALMON,

London NW8.

"And if they fit you properly you can take them back!"

Men seeking men

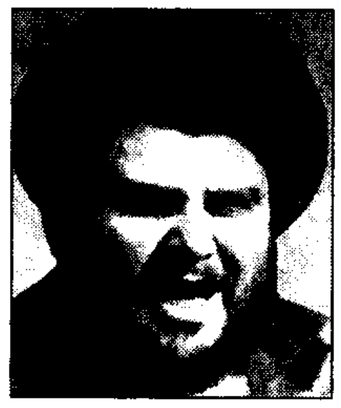
37 YEAR OLD , romantic chap, who enjoys the good things in life, requires a chubby copper, 40+, preferably hair suit. Ntw please.

Daily Telegraph

DR SPOONER REVISITED

Lookalike

Moqtada



Mark

Sir,

I noticed this pair while flicking through the Telegraph. You never see Mark Steyn and Moqtada al-Sadr in the same room. Could the cool-headed man of peace and the bearded warmongering firebrand be, by any chance, related?

STEVE DUNTHORNE

Blackpool

Electric plug

Sir,

Your small piece about EDF Energy contains a factual inaccuracy in that you say that "it is planning to raise electricity prices by 6.9 percent and gas by 4.5 percent". If you had checked the press releases of the company (or indeed asked any of the five million customers) you would have found out that the price rise in fact came into force on 1 March.

You also failed to note that while many companies have shown a mania for offshoring call centre and support jobs that EDF Energy has given a commitment to keeping jobs in the UK, a relief for the more than 10,000 people it employs all over the country, of which I am one, and all the other noteworthy attempts at helping the community that we live in. Support for NCH, community projects where workers themselves are involved being two such examples.

Yours

CHRIS MITCHELL,

Via email.

Share deals

Sir,

I am sick to death of "Bruin" telling us that shares in company X are worth much less now than 10 years ago, while those in company Y have soared.

If he's so bloody smart why didn't he tell us that in 1994, so we could have all made a packet?

Regards,

NICK THOMPSON,

Cambridge.

Screamer

Sir,

With none of the usual apologies for pernickety pedantry, because if your correspondent Brian Leedham is too thick to understand the meaning of Edvard Munch's fine painting, you with all your expensive classical educations ought not to be, I would like to point out that it is not the figure you have portrayed who is doing the screaming.

The sound of the "Scream" itself emanates from the land, and the poor unfortunate person is covering her/his ears whilst displaying an expression of abject horror.

Of course, you may be subconsciously indicating your and everyone else's natural desire to scream at Johnson at every available opportunity; but from the expression on his face I doubt if any such would percolate through. Otherwise, keep up the excellent work.

Yours faithfully,

BRYN GLOVER,

Cracoe, North Yorks.

Changing trains

Sir,

Sir Patrick Brown can answer for himself (1105, Aiming for Amey). However it is I who has [sic] been chairman of Thames Trains since 1996, through the awful tragedy of Ladbroke Grove and the subsequent transformation of the business by the local management and staff. I am proud to have been associated with that team and very sorry we lost the franchise last month.

Yours,

MARTIN BALLINGER,

Via email.

Lookalike

Sinead

Graham

Sir,

I wonder if anybody else has noticed the resemblance between baldy cue-wielder Graham Dott, and baldy microphone-wielder Sinead O'Connor.

Nothing compares to you? Surely some mistake?

Yours sincerely,

BARRY THOMPSON

Via email

Burt speak

Sir,

Knocking copy, you have it in for Sir Peter Burt because he is chairman of ITV and also a board member of Shell. This is a low blow. After all, Sir Philip ("Phil" before his gong) Watts' predecessor as managing director of exploration and production and chairman of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group was Sir Mark Moody Stuart — now chairman of Anglo-American. It was under the latter's watch (funny how they're all sailors) that things began to go awry on reserve estimation. But that's all right, because now we're mining, eh?

Yours etc,

MICHAEL JEFFERSON,

Felmersham, Bedfordshire.

Own goal

Sir,

I was shocked to see that Neasden FC failed to lose their latest match (Eye 1105). Even though the game was abandoned after two minutes, surely there was time for Pevsner to score an own goal to maintain the club's unblemished record of losing every game this season? The North Circular League will never be the same again.

Yours sick as a parrot,

JONATHAN LEWSEY,

Orchard Street, London.

The Football Editor writes: *Neasden were actually 10-0 down after two minutes but, due to a typographical error, the score was printed as 0-0. All the goals were scored by Pevsner.*

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I don't know if it's the first time twins have represented Wales, but it's certainly unique..."

Football official, Radio Wales
(Phil Davies)

"Ameobi stretches out one of his long right legs..."

Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(Colin Heathcote)

"Sometimes, at the back of your head, you take your foot off the gasometer."

ALLY McCOIST, ITV
(Dick Bluer)

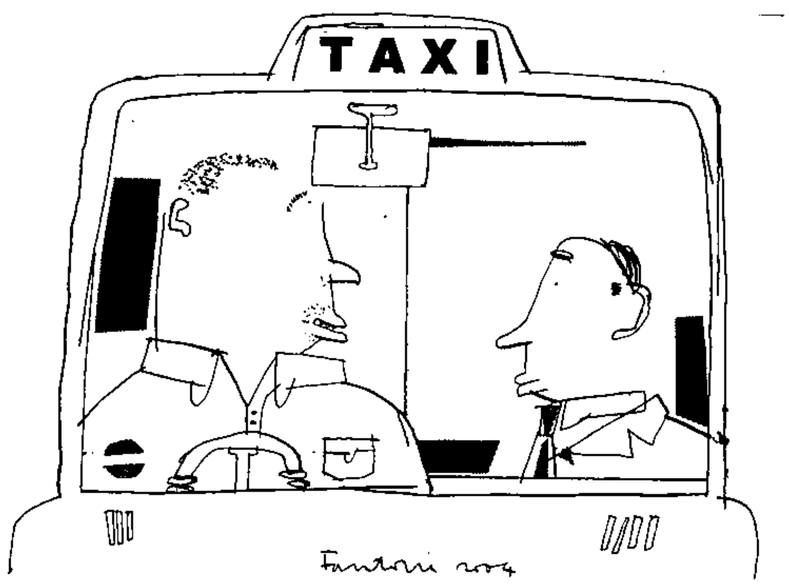
"By 2012, a third of every adult will be obese."

DR HILLARY JONES, GMTV
(Andy Smith)

"All the reds are in the open now, apart from the blue."

JOHN VIRGO, BBC
(James Baxter)

Scenes You Seldom See



"I don't have any opinions, guv, so I'll be more than happy to listen to yours"

Back from the dead

Sir,

In your letter from Saudi Arabia (1105) it is reported that "the suicide bombers who killed more than 50 people in attacks last year are back".

I suspect they aren't.

Shurely shome mishtake.

BOB FERRIS,

Banstead, Surrey.

Bum note

Sir,

In the Music & Musicians column in Eye 1104 you strongly imply that the BBC has flogged off ("offload" is the word used) the magazine BBC Music to an obscure "Bristol-based publisher called Origin". It would have been a little more honest (certainly more informative) to tell your readers that Origin is owned by... er... the BBC.

Likewise, your comments on Classic CD, with their implication that the west of England is too much of a cultural backwater for anyone here to have even heard of classical music, would have been rather less credible had you admitted that Classic CD was conceived and born in Bath.

But I suppose that if you had gone that far, you might have had to mention that Classic CD was published from Bath for several years by Kevin Cox, the man who now heads Origin Publishing, which would have undermined the picture you are trying to paint of a prestigious title facing the unspeakable barbarity of being mismanaged by a company whose expertise does not stretch beyond cross-stitching.

It may be cynical of me, but I can't help feeling that the real story here is that a bunch of pampered music hacks don't like the idea of: (a) being more than a tube ride from the "classical cocktail circuit" your correspondent rather unwisely mentions; (b) finding themselves working for management that would undoubtedly want to wean them from subsidy (you do admit that BBC Music has been a loss-maker).

Or to put it another way, do they fear that they may be expected to concentrate a little more on the Boulez and a little less on the Lunchtime?

MARTYN LESTER,

Bath.

Just say Nein

Sir,

Richard "Dirty" Desmond is quoted in Private Eye (1105) as having said repeatedly "I hate fucking Germans".

If he hates it so much, the remedy is easy — why doesn't he just stop doing it?

Yours faithfully,

PETER SWAIN,

Dunbar.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Podgorica**

from Our Own Correspondent

A JUNIOR partner in the once glorious socialist federal republic of Yugoslavia, this is a time of growing uncertainty here in the Balkan paradise of Montenegro.

In the spring sunshine we can ponder our three national pastimes: drinking extraordinary amounts of coffee, state-sponsored smuggling and racketeering and the fate of our embattled prime minister, Milo Djukanovic, whose fortunes are on the wane.

In the bad old days, when Milosevic ruled in Belgrade and burning other peoples' villages was all the rage, Milo, with his "business first" style of politics, was feted in the west. But that was then. Inflation and decay now mean civil service salaries here are falling behind even Serbia, and unless you've some sort of racket, life's getting harder. The only bright spot is that most of us *do* have some sort of racket – Milo included.

Last month the US state department revealed that a current European Union lawsuit named our PM as the kingpin of a cigarette-trafficking operation involving the Italian mafia and the tobacco company RJ Reynolds that runs into hundreds of millions of euros. The US International Narcotics Control Strategy Report says the Italian mafia runs a trafficking company named Montenegrin Tabak Transit (MTT) "under the official sanction of the Montenegrin Foreign Investment Agency and the special protection of Djukanovic". Judges in Naples and Bari are also on his case.

Some in the region are ready to indulge in any illegal trade. But in Montenegro there are limits. We don't, for example, stoop to selling our own girls. Why would we when we can buy women from Moldova instead? Some of our top people are at it. Back in 2002 a Moldovan woman escaped from forced prostitution in Podgorica, our capital, and burst into a police station alleging that some of Milo's henchmen had led the trafficking ring that brought her to Montenegro, and that a number of very senior politicians had engaged in frantic discussions over Uganda with her at parties. No less than the deputy state attorney Zoran Piperovic was arrested for pimping and trafficking but then found innocent. Doubtless he was; and of course we all have faith in the judicial system. But the episode did little to burnish our name abroad.

But it's the cigarette investigations that are really spooking Milo. The best card in his hand is secession. He'd like to be in charge of a whole country, rather than just a bit of a country, as is the case under a current marriage with Serbia. Whether a country of just 600,000 people — a good portion of whom are Albanians who might be tempted to cut the cake thinner still — is viable is open to question. But what the threat of secession does offer is the spectre of renewed Balkan chaos and the opportunity for Milo to lean on his former friends in Europe.

An independent Montenegro would encourage separatists in Kosovo, Macedonia, southern Serbia and Bosnia to start trouble again, and everyone's tired of that now. This prospect though gives Milo leverage with western governments otherwise sorely tired of his antics — not least the UK, where your huge tobacco duty creates big demand for contraband cigarettes from all over the Balkans.

If Milo backs off secession, there are other options for heading off these awkward judicial probes. The Russian firm SUAL is poised to buy up our only worthwhile legitimate business, the Podgorica aluminium smelter. Although there is meant to be an open tender for the smelter, plant boss Mihailo Banjevic is touchingly frank about his plans to select SUAL. Banjevic, a former leader of a folk dance troupe and manager of the Titograd socialist information centre, doubtless has his reasons. Milo, too, may find the Russians more reliable friends than the fair weather western Europeans.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

O "As an unemployed man, I believe that the government has a legal obligation to provide for my health and bodily well-being," Helmut Heine informed a court in Nuremberg. "My wife went to visit her family in Thailand six months ago, and I cannot afford to fly her back to Germany. So either the government should pay for her air ticket, or they should reimburse me for my weekly visits to a brothel, and any other expenses that are necessary to satisfy my heightened sexual needs during her prolonged absence.

"As a married man, I would never cheat on my wife by seeking a lover. But I was suffering from serious sexual withdrawal symptoms that were affecting my health, and I needed to satisfy my lust. At first, I asked the social security authorities to buy me an inflatable rubber doll, and a foot pump, because I am a weak man, but they refused. So I made my own arrangements, then sent them a bill for sixteen visits to a brothel at 100 euros per visit, as well as for sixty-two pornographic films, several dozen contact magazines, the complete set of 'Barnyard Orgy Tales,' and travelling expenses. The total was just over 2,645 euros, but once again they refused to pay. Why? Other citizens have been given state funding to purchase Viagra, so why shouldn't I be reimbursed too?"

Rejecting Heine's demand, the court ruled that "social security benefits already cover 'cost of living' payments, which include a person's sexual needs." Heine is expected to appeal against the decision, at the taxpayers' expense. *(Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 5/3/04. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

– O –

O *"Somalia is full of tourist attractions," Abdi Jimale Osman told reporters in Mogadishu, "but sadly nobody knows about them. The sun shines, the beaches are sandy, and you can dine on lobster on the roof of the Sharmo Hotel, which commands a splendid view of the capital. If only tourists would come, I'm sure they would leave Somalia alive, and I'm hopeful that they wouldn't be kidnapped. At least, we would try to make sure they were not kidnapped, although it can happen."*

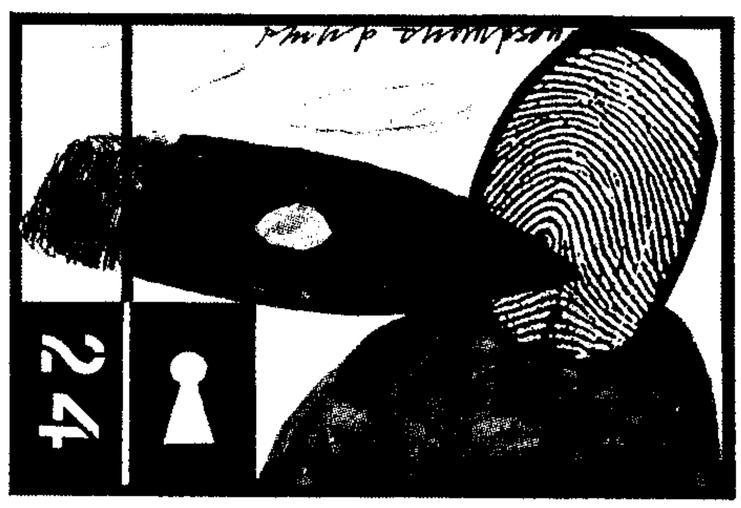
Mr Jimale, Somalia's minister of tourism, had earlier admitted that his war-torn country has not had a single officially acknowledged tourist since the 1980s. "The Sharmo Hotel advises guests to hire at least ten armed guards to escort them from the airport, and for extra protection you can buy hand grenades in the market for $10 each, or a howitzer for $20,000.

"Tourists can still go and see the former beautiful sights, but the only problem is they're all totally destroyed. What's left of the cathedral is still very attractive, but if you go there, you must beware of stepping on landmines. Our national parks were once very fine too, but they mainly lie in areas that the government now does not control. And unfortunately most of the animals have disappeared too, because we have eaten them." (The Economist, 6/3/04. Spotter: Anon)

– O –

O "This is the first time a defendant has ever asked me to increase his length of his imprisonment," declared Justice Gerald Jewers, while passing sentence in a Manitoba court, "but your reasoning seems rational enough to me. As a lifelong smoker, you would rather be incarcerated for longer in a prison where smoking is allowed, than for less time in Headingley Correctional Centre where it is banned. I am therefore increasing your sentence from 20 months to 24 months and a day, to be served in Stony Mountain prison."

Justice Jewers was passing sentence on seventy-three-year-old Angelo Foti, who had



earlier been found guilty of shooting and wounding an intruder in the backyard of his Charleswood home. "The law is very clear that two years is the benchmark for determining where an inmate serves his time. Anything less is a provincial sentence, anything more is a federal sentence. Your victim, Jason Stein, pleaded with me to give you a lenient sentence, but the law demands a prison term for such firearms offences. You are clearly agitated at the prospect of spending twenty months in Headingley, where smoking is outlawed under provincial legislation. So after consulting with your lawyer, I have agreed to increase your sentence, which means you can go to Stony Mountain, where federal law still allows smoking." *(Winnipeg Free Press, 2/3/04. Spotter: Peter Hughes)*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And we've recently been celebrating a very special day!

Obviously, I don't just mean my birthday – although, of course, that was a pretty special day!

And can I just say a big thank you to all those parishioners who sent me cards, presents and flowers!

It is a great shame that they must all have got lost in the post! And, don't worry, I'll be taking that one up at the very highest level with the postman, if he ever dares show his face around here again!

No – what, of course, we've all been celebrating and giving thanks for is the 25th anniversary of that shining inspiration to us all, the Blessed Margaret.

For some of the children who may not know the story – and even for some of the grown-ups who may have forgotten – let me just remind you of the remarkable contribution she made to the life of our parish.

Born in a humble corner shop hundreds of years ago, she rose to become the first woman priest to be put in charge of St Albion's.

And, by golly, didn't she change everything for ever!

Who will forget the moment when she first arrived on the doorstep of the vicarage, the light creating a supernatural halo around her head, and adapted those famous words of St Francis of Sinatra, "I'm going to do it my way"!

Of course, there were plenty of people – and there still are – who said that the Deaconess was difficult to live with and work for!

But saints, by their very nature, are difficult people. They upset people by telling the truth!

They annoy people by being right all the time!

They have the courage to do things that other people are too scared or cowardly to do!

Hey, I'm no saint (not yet at least!), but people say the same thing of me. He's difficult, they say. He just wants to do everything *his* way, they say. I've even heard one or two people saying "he's mad"!

But that's exactly what they used to say about the Blessed Margaret (before, sadly, she went mad and had to be burned at the stake!).

But all that is behind us now, as we demonstrated when we consecrated our new Iron Lady Chapel, with that wonderful statue by Mr Nougerede. The event was only slightly marred by the very curious antics of our local solicitor, Mr Howard, who has recently settled in the parish after emigrating from Transylvania.

It was a great shame that he should have chosen this particular solemn occasion to shout out that he actually knew the Blessed Margaret, and that she had annointed him to be her representative on earth!

Talk about mad! Who's the madman here? If anyone's mad, it's him, Mr Howard!

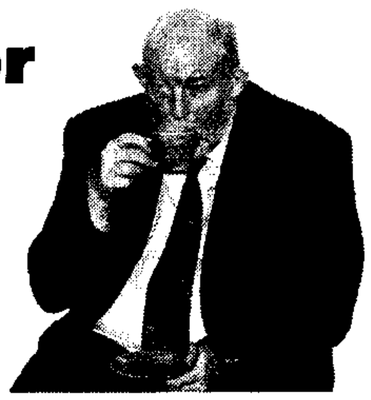
He's mad, Mad, MAD! Do you hear?

Yours going for a lie-down,

Tony

The new Iron Lady Chapel with the statue by local sculptor Mr Nougerede!

Get Fit For Summer!!!



With Charles Clarke, Chairman of the Governors of St Albion's Technology, Skills and Lifelong Learning Beacon College (formerly the Herbert Morrison Comprehensive)

Mr Clarke writes:

We all owe it to the Vicar to keep as fit and slim as possible. Don't get me wrong! You don't need to go to the gym to spend hours on a bicycling machine!

You don't have to give up eating your favourite burgers and fries!

Just try this simple exercise routine, which will soon pay handsome dividends when it comes to the feel-good factor!

Day One

1. Take a leisurely walk down to the polling station.
2. Place a cross next to the word 'Vicar'.
3. Walk home again.

Estimated calorie loss: up to 16,000.

Start today the Charlie Clarke way!

Watch out for more tips next week!

A Message from Rev. Dubya Bush of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons

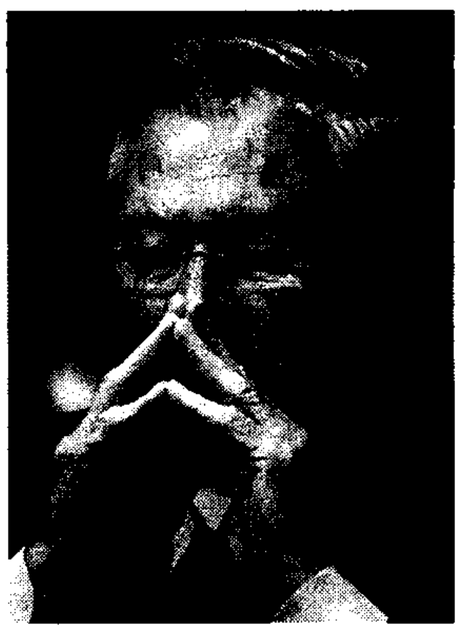
Brothers and Sisters in Albionland, it grieves me sorely to tell you that one of my trusted pastors, Brother Rumsfeld, has confessed to grave misdoingtudes and grievous errornesses which have brought our mission in Iraq into serious disreputability!

But rest assured, my Bretheren Across the Bay, I have rebuked Brother Rumsfeld for his transgressuals and for his falling into the hands of the evil one who lurketh who knoweth where.

And the sinner Rumsfeld hath repentethed and in is now in a state of penitude.

And so I have forgiven him, as the *Book of Revelations in the New Yorker* says, "There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than ninety-nine Iraqis tortured to death".

Praise be to the Lord! Alleluia!



Brother Rumsfeld says: "I'm sorry... I was caught!!" T.B.

PCC Elections

This year we have introduced a very important change in the arrangements for our parish elections. I know many of you have been concerned at the low turnouts in recent years, because people were so happy with the way the parish was being run that they didn't need to go down to the primary school to put their X next to the Vicar's name! But now, in an effort to give the young people of the parish a sense that they too can participate in the running of parish affairs, we have decided to lower the voting age to five. Now all the members of our Sunday School can feel really involved, though we will have to keep the voting form simple!

I have, therefore, drafted this easy-to-use voting form, which even the smallest toddler will be able to understand!

Do you like the Vicar?

Yes	
Yes	

Just tick one box (or both if you want!)

And, don't worry, even if you lose your voting slip, under our new postal ballot system we'll still count that as a 'yes' vote!

And just to encourage everyone, the children will be singing this new version of a favourite old song, with Mrs Hodge at the electric keyboard.

Boys and girls come out to vote,
Grab your hat and grab your coat,
Leave your telly and your mobile phone,
Here's your chance to vote for Tone.

Let's make sure we all join in, shall we children? T.B.

'THIS TORTURE MUST STOP'

Blair's plea

by Our Political Staff
Lunchtime O'Buse

THE PRIME Minister made a dramatic call to the nation last night to stop torturing him with suggestions that he knew about human rights abuses in Iraq.

"I have been subjected to brutal interrogations," said the Prime Minister, "with people trying to get me to break down and admit my war crimes."

Electric shock and awe

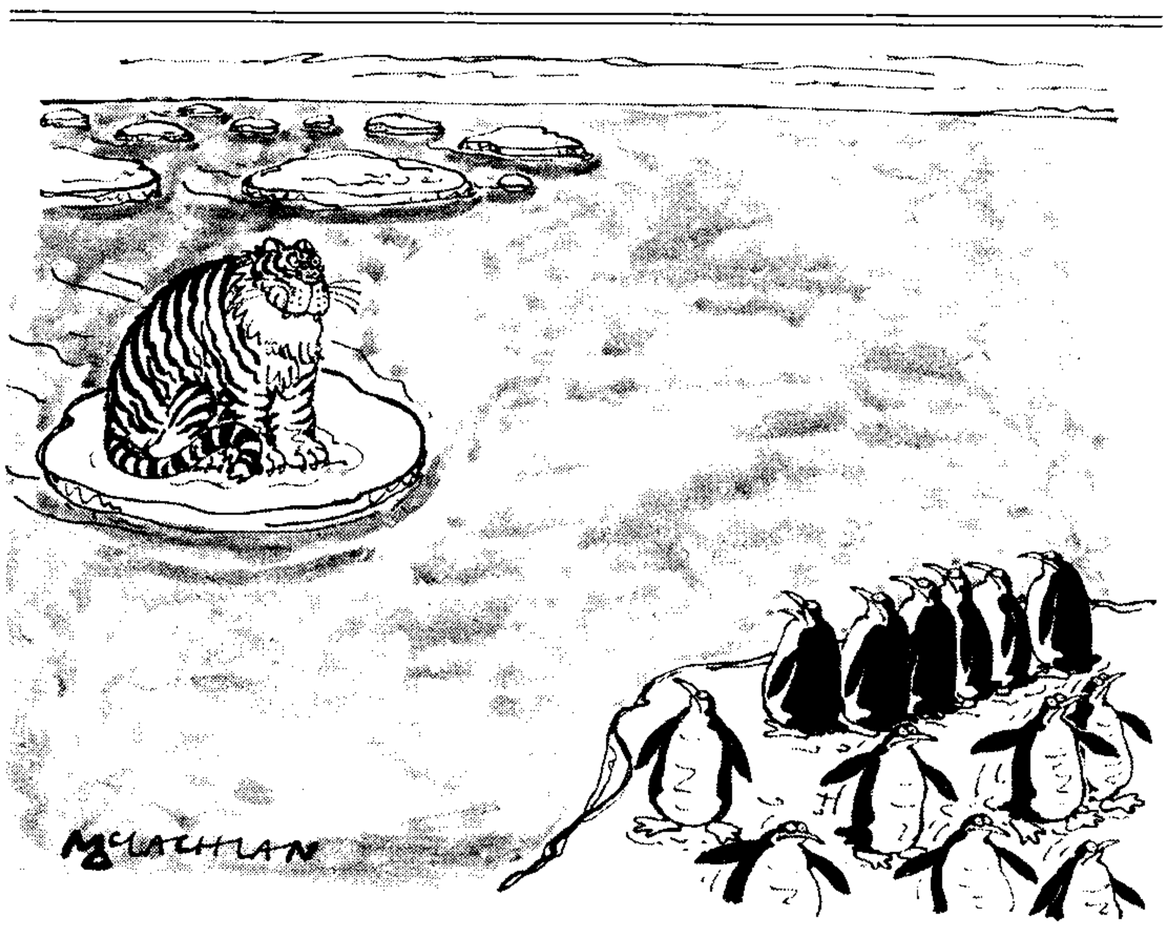
"On one occasion," he claimed, "I was taken from my home late at night and bright lights were shone in my face. Then they started filming me, and at one point I was humiliated by my jacket being removed."

He continued: "One of them, I think he was called Jeremy, kept on and on asking me the same question – 'You knew all about this didn't you?'

"In the end I just wanted it to stop. I would have said anything, even 'sorry', which I did but I don't mean it."

ON OTHER PAGES: Why I have changed my mind about Iraq by Johann Hari-Kiri, Minette Marinade, Tony Parshole and everybody else except Melanie Phillips **pp2-94**

POLAND'S PRESIDENT FLIES IN



"I've never worried much about global warming until now"

Advertisement

MICHAEL HOWARD
Curriculum Vitae

1666:
Born Transylvania. Son of a humble count, Vlad Dracul.

1669:
Attends Transylvania Grammar School where he gains an A grade in Human Physiology.

1702-1897:
Terrorises local villagers and appears in films pursued by Dr Van Helsing.

1983:
Elected MP for Folkstone and Hythe.

1987:
Introduces Stake Tax and outlaws the carrying of crucifixes in public places.

1993:
Becomes Home Secretary and bans garlic.

1997:
Attempted exorcism by Dr Ann Widdecombe fails and Howard retreats to coffin in house of commons crypt.

2003:
Awakens to become leader of the Conservative Party.

2004:
Becomes more popular than Tony Blair, thus provoking this pathetic advert in an attempt to scare off voters during the local elections.

Britain is working. Don't let The Tories drink your blood and make you join the Undead.

Labour
www.labour.org.uk

That Fatty Soames Defence of the Army in full

"IN ANY organisation there are bound to be a few rotten apples but I know the British Army and I have absolute confidence that the military authorities will act swiftly and justly to stamp out these rotten apples, although they haven't so far... er... I know the British Army well and I am certain that what we are dealing with here is a small number of bad eggs of the type one wouldn't eat in an omelette however delicious... er... our troops are the finest in the world and unlike the Americans we have had long experience in Northern Ireland of doing this sort of thing and then holding enquiries about it... er... and it's clearly just a few rotten tomatoes in the soup with croutons and some parmesan please and then I'll have the saddle of lamb washed down with a couple of rotten bottles of... er... where was I? I know the British Army extremely well having served for over three luncheons... er... and all I can say that these disclosures make life very difficult for the chaps in the restaurant and of course the field. If these Iraqis get the idea into their heads that we are torturing them, then they are going to get pretty shirty and before long they'll be trying not to get captured in case they get murdered... so I suggest that we all shut up about this and go and have our lunch at once, otherwise we may not get a table, it fills very quickly at this time of year..."

Boris Johnson on his doubts surrounding the conduct of the Iraqi war

‘Golly! Cripes! What’s going on? When I signed up to support this war lark, no one said it was going to turn nasty!

Makes you feel a bit of a chump! I mean, didn’t we go over there to liberate Johnny Iraqi? You know – crowds cheering, flags waving, happy smiling kiddies chewing gum, that sort of thing?

Nobody mentioned torture. Chaps getting their private parts kicked in. That’s a bit strong, isn’t it? We didn’t even do that sort of thing at Eton. Well, we did actually, but that’s not the point.

The point is that old Boris has been sold a pup by our Yankee cousins, and I’m feeling a bit of a prat. Blimey!’

● Do you think the new Shadow Minister for the Arts is a bit of a chump? Join the ‘Big Chump Debate’ at ww.beanoboris.com

Daily Mail, Friday, May 14, 2004

Time Someone Stuck Up For Rain!

Says **Max Hastings**, The World’s Worst Columnist *(apart from Amanda Platell)*

THIS morning I awoke to the familiar drumming sound of raindrops on my window pane.

“Oh dear, it’s raining again!” Already I could hear the long-faced Jeremiahs bemoaning what, for some of us at least, is the most uplifting sound the English countryside can offer.

I have never understood why it is fashionable to complain about a little drop of rain.

The barbecue brigade moan that it is spoiling their weekend fun, and that now they will have to stay huddled round their Aga with their sad jacket potatoes and burned bangers.

The white-flannelled fools rush for the pavilion, belly-aching that rain is going to “stop play”.

So be it, say I! There’s nothing like putting on your Barbour and your wellies, to go splashing through the puddles!

Splish, splash, splish, splash! Rommel, my favourite black labrador, just loves it, bounding across the rain-sodden meadows with a disembowelled fox between his jaws!

I know how he feels. Who are the fools who sing “Rain, rain, go to Spain”?

Why should the Spaniards have all the fun?

I say, “Rain, rain, stay here in England”. And I’ll tell you something else... Rain’s got a job to do. Unlike myself, who just sits here, waiting for the Mail to ring up and ask me to fill up page 10.

© Hitlertrash Productions (Hungerford)

● Are you pro- or anti-rain? Join the “Great Rain Debate” at www.rainyawn.co.uk

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam The 11th Duke Of Devonshire

So. Farewell
Then Your
Grace
As I believe
Is the correct etiquette
When addressing
A Duke.

But why were you
The Duke Of Devonshire
When you lived
In Derbyshire?

This is a mystery
Which cannot be
Resolved
In a short poem
Of this
Kind.

The 11th E.J. Thribb (17½)

● If you have any thoughts on the “Great Duke Debate”, please leave your comments on our website – www.snobline.co.uk

SALLY JOCKSTRAP

The Voice Of Sport

FORTY years ago Roger Bannister won the Derby and rewrote the record books with his amazing score of 400 runs in a minute.

And yet Claudio Ranieri wants to sack him. What sort of mad world are we living in?

More next week from Five Live’s own Sally Jockstrap – Sports Writer of the Year, British Press Awards, 2005.

the PREMIERSH*TS

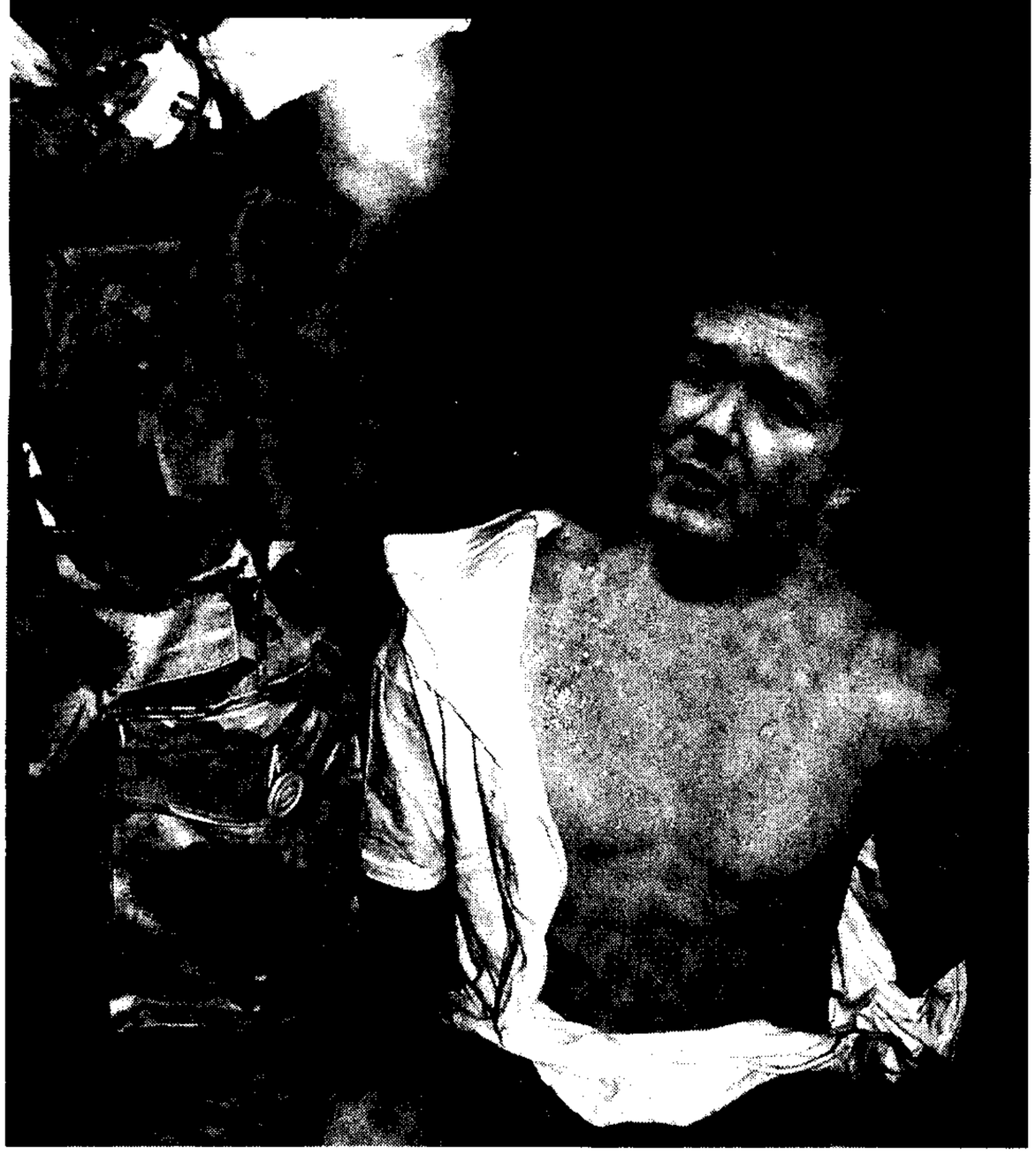
Paul Woon

News In Brief

FOOTBALLER MIGHT GET TRANSFER TO ANOTHER TEAM AND THEN AGAIN HE MIGHT NOT

STUNNING news emerged last night when it became clear that a footballer might be getting a transfer to another team. To heighten the controversy, another source later revealed that he might not be getting a transfer after all.

VILE



THIS picture has shocked the entire civilised world.

It shows the whole newspaper industry pissing all over Daily Mirror editor Piers Moron for publishing some dodgy photographs in his paper.

The Eye says: **This humiliating abuse is illegal and should be stopped immediately! Leave Piers alone!** ***(Surely some mistake? Ed.)***

BUT IS THIS PICTURE A FAKE?

This appears to be a picture of Piers Moron working in his office. But is it? Moron experts last night pointed out a host of discrepancies which indicate that the newspaper was clearly a fake:

1. **The clock on the wall shows the time at 2pm. Insiders point out that Moron would never be back from lunch until 5.30pm.**
2. **Moron does not display any signs of the savage beating he recently received at the hands of TV motoring expert Jeremy Clarkson.**
3. **There is no photo on the desk of gorgeous, pouting Marina Hyde.**
4. **Also absent from the desk is Moron's prized 'Vigien' mouse-mat, a souvenir of his historic 'share tipping' triumph.**
5. **Further clinching evidence that the desk in the picture cannot be genuine is that it contains no half-empty bottles.**
6. **Moron's shoelaces appear to be neatly tied. Staffers insist that he has never learned how to perform this simple task.**

But last night an unrepentant Moron hit back at his critics. "Of course I am a fake. The idea that I am the editor of a national newspaper is patently absurd."

TV Highlights

The Last Episode Of Friends

MILLIONS will tune in tonight to watch the conclusion of the long-running American sitcom that has dominated the world for as long as anyone can remember.

In the final instalment the on/off relationship between the two main characters, Tony and George, is left hanging in their air as they accuse each other of war crimes.

In a bittersweet climax, Condee says she was right all along whereas poor Colin is left feeling a fool and may be due for a nervous breakdown.

EYE RATING: Torture

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Friend of the Prime Minister

GEORGE Crony, the master spy, is given the job as head of MI6, following his brilliant report that got the Prime Minister off the hook by claiming the Government had nothing to do with the famous "Dodgy Dossier"

There is no mystery as to why he was given the job so the series ends very quickly.

Cast in full

George Crony.....John Scarlett
John Scarlett .....Alec Guinness
Martin MI6-Smith .....John Cleese
M .....Q

EYE RATING: 45 minutes too long

Dr Hoon

BRITAIN's least popular Waste-Of-Timelord returns in a new adventure in which he fails to read a Red Cross report about Iraq.

Repeating his favourite catchphrase, "I knew nothing about it", Dr Hoon escapes in the Tardis and lives to fight another day.

EYE RATING: Exterminate

More top comedy from *'Allo 'Allo!*, UK Gold 1.35 am

TV ROYAL MAIL PROGRAMME SHOCKS NATION

by Our Postal Staff **Phil Sack**

MILLIONS of viewers were stunned yesterday by a television programme which depicted the unbelievable truth about Britain's postal system.

The TV show followed one postman, referred to only as Pat, who was seen going about his business in Greendale, accompanied by a black and white cat. Pat was shown putting letters in his sack and then delivering them to the correct addresses.

Said one stunned viewer, "I couldn't believe my eyes! At no stage did he open the letters, steal the credit cards, or dump undelivered mail in a skip".

The Royal Mail was, however, quick to defend its staff. "Pat is just one isolated case. The public can rest assured that the vast majority of Britain's postmen are either useless or in league with Nigerian crime syndicates."

DIRTY DEN IN NEW SHOCK

by Our Showbiz Staff **Alison Tossoff**

LESLIE GRANTHAM has denied bringing the BBC into disrepute by taking part in a sick broadcast called *EastEnders*.

"Images featuring Grantham and others have been beamed into unsuspecting viewers homes via a device known as their television," claimed one Sunday tabloid. "These sick transmissions regularly feature storylines involving murders, rapes and incest, despite the fact that at that time of the evening children could be in the room."

"It is wrong that Grantham and his like can expose their lack of acting ability with sick transmissions like this that are being funded by us through the licence fee," said one horrified viewer.

Grantham however, quickly denied that he was involved. "I had nothing to do with it, I was too busy playing with myself on the internet to get involved with degrading filth like *EastEnders*."

THOSE 'DIRTY'S IN FULL

Dirty Den Seedy TV actor caught by newspapers in pornography scandal

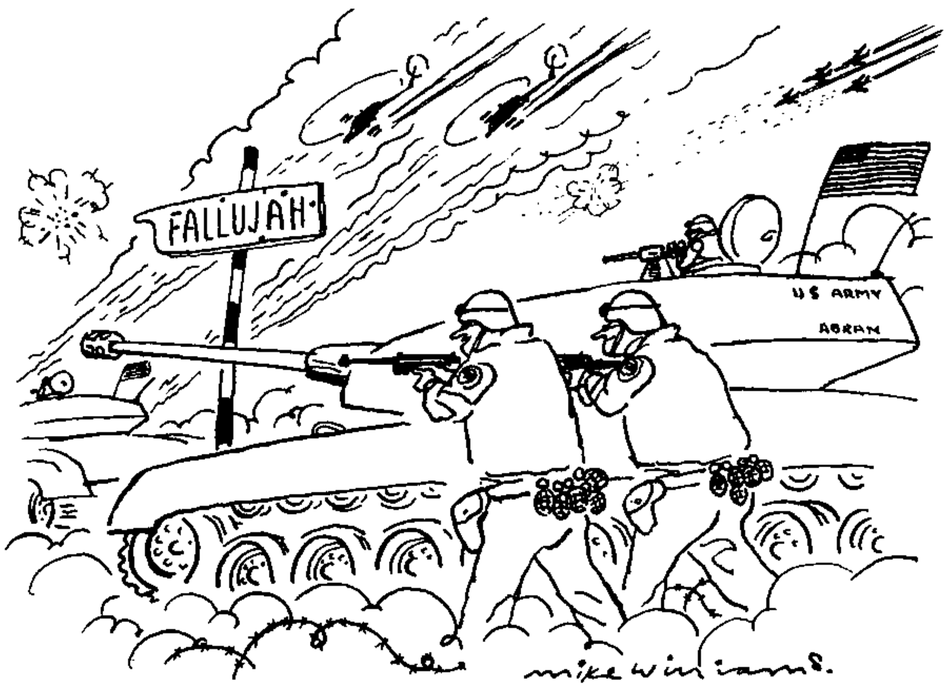
Dirty Des Seedy pornographer caught acting as newspaper proprietor

Dirty Digger Seedy newspaper and TV proprietor caught acting as if he was the Prime Minister

Dirty Harry Neither seedy nor pornographic but on TV constantly anyway

Dirty Wooster Little-known P.G. Wodehouse hero caught in a compromising position with Aunt Agatha *(That's enough. Ed.)*

"I'm sorry, but at the end of the day he's still a cockroach"



"Hey! Great thinking! Why not throw in a squadron of Israeli tanks!"

THE THATCHER LEGACY
How Britain Has Changed

THEN	NOW
Uncertainty over European future	Future of Europe uncertain
Education in crisis	Crisis in education
Failure of public transport	Public transport failure
Health service in trouble	Trouble in health service
Conservative Prime Minister	Prime Minister conservative
Thatcher on TV	Thatcher on TV

POLLY FILLER

SORRY, Gwyneth – you've blown it! Any hopes you had of playing *me* in the forthcoming film of my best-selling book *Mummy For Old Rope* by Polly Filler, have just gone out of the window! How could you say, recently-pregnant Ms Paltrow, that mothers shouldn't work and should stay at home and look after their children?

It's a well-known fact that working mothers are much *better* mothers than the stay-at-home neurotics, because their children turn out independent, challenging and fluent in Estonian – thank you Cskurg, our brilliant new au pair who arrived on May 1st!

And not only do we working mums allow our children the freedom to bond with a variety of teenage immigrants from cultures as diverse as Iraq and Colombia, but our very absence at work means that our children are more pleased to see us at the end of the day before we go out to the theatre or dinner!

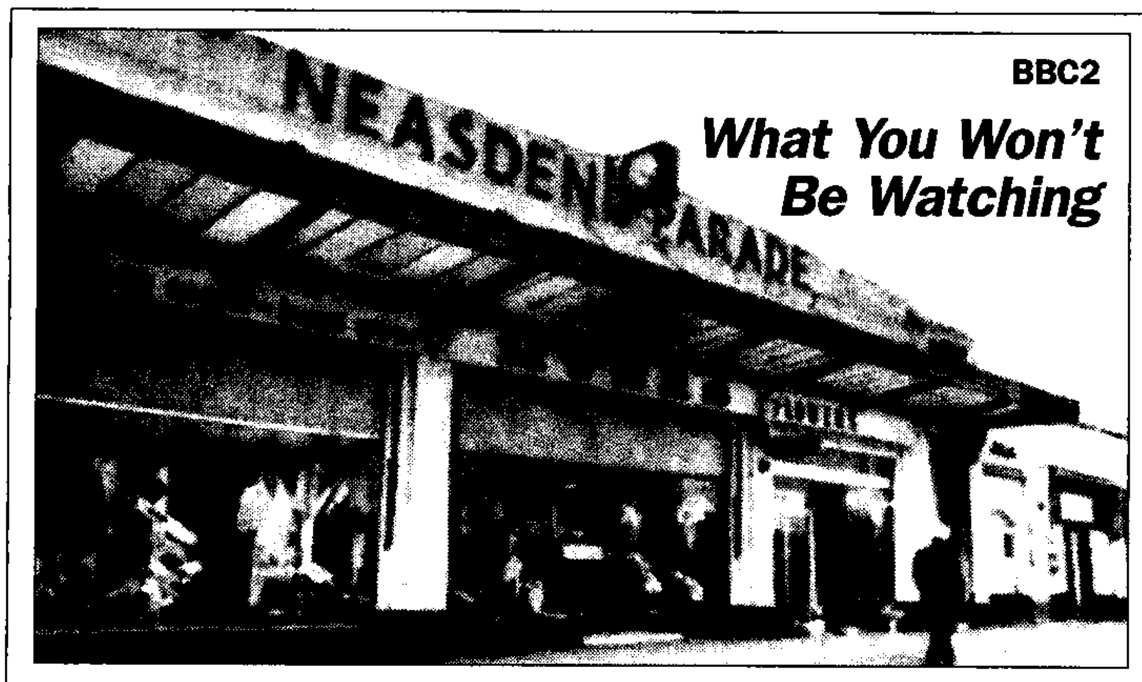
In fact, Charlie, our funny, energetic four-year-old, loves to play games with me, asking me who I am and quizzing Cskurg about who the strange woman is in the living room!!!

BUT above all, Gwyneth, love, you'll only know what motherhood is *really* about when you realise you haven't got just one baby but two! Wait till your bloke from Coldplay is slobbing in the next room watching 'Underwater Quadbiking from Okinawa' on Granada's Frogmen and Motors Channel (like a certain useless partner I could mention but I won't, to spare Simon's blushes).

Then Gwyneth, dearie, you'll suddenly find yourself desperate to go out to work – but you won't be able to. And you know why? Because I won't cast you as Polly in my brilliant new film, as I'll have offered the part to Kate Winslet! (Fine actress and sensible working mum!!)

Sorry! And good luck with the going mad alone in the kitchen with the screaming, puking infant and the bottle of white wine!!

© *Polly Filler.*



PETER ACKROYD'S NEASDEN

THE great novelist and biographer of our time leads us on an extraordinary guided tour of historic Neasden.

Portly red-faced man with moustache *(standing outside The Boston Arms)*: Good evening. The Romans called this place 'Neasdinium' and Tacitus memorably described it as 'a dismal swamp, inhabited only by the *Moronii*'.

(Ackroyd enters bar and downs several pints of local Czech-brewed lager, 'The Pride of Neasden')

Ackroyd: It's amazing to think that Dickens never came here. But had he done so, he might have met Florence Nightingale, if she had ever come here.

(Enter two actors dressed as Nell Gwynne and Sir Christopher Wren. Tinkling spinet plays Hubert Gregg's 'Maybe It's Because I'm A Neasdener')

Wren: Forsooth, sirrah, would that I had built this hostelry instead of St Paul's.

Nell Gwynne: Ooh, you are a one, Sir Christopher!

(Red-faced man falls off bar stool)

Landlord: Don't you think you've had enough, sir?

Ackroyd *(on floor)*: Certainly not. I haven't had time to do the Great Fire of Neasden.

Cast In Full

Peter Ackroyd . . . . . Himself
Boadicea . . . . Lady Thatcher
Dr Johnson . . . . Stephen Fry
Stephen Fry . . . . Oscar Wilde
Samuel Pepys . . . . Sir Donald Sinden
Man In Sedan Chair . . . . Sir David Frost

NEXT WEEK: *The Blitz Comes To Dollis Hill*

"May I remind you the divorce is not technically granted 'til the decree absolute..."

Old Israeli Peace Plan	New Israeli Peace Plan
● Removal of settlers from Gaza.	● Removal of Sharon as Prime Minister.
● Withdrawal of four settlements in West Bank.	● Withdrawal of Palestinians from everywhere.

MARY ANN BIGHEAD

WHAT I DID ON MY HOLIDAYS

THIS bank holiday I took my daughter on a weekend break to Auschwitz.

This was a good idea because she is so clever and so am I. We both understood everything, unlike the other people who were there who were not nearly as clever as me and my daughter.

Some people think that Auschwitz is too awful an experience for a child, but luckily my daughter is incredibly mature and imaginative and talkative and bright and actually very much like her mother.

Some other people also brought their children to Auschwitz, but they had ordinary children and I told these parents off for their stupidity. My daughter, however, fully understood the implications of our visit, ie that I would have to turn our intensely personal private journey into a few hundred words to fill up my column in the Times. Luckily, I am so clever that I do not notice anything odd about this.

Our pilgrimage has, however, reminded us of the real message of these appalling places – that I am very clever and so is my daughter.

© *Mary Ann Bighead*

WILD SCENES AS EUROPE UNITES IN CELEBRATION

by Phil Space

OVER 400 billion 'New Europeans' came out onto the streets yesterday to celebrate the most important day in the history of the world.

After 40 centuries of bloodshed, war and torture, as the clocks struck midnight on 1 May 2004, Europe declared itself at last as one big happy family, reunited in a tidal wave of mutual love and boredom *(Surely 'willing cooperation'? Ed.)*.

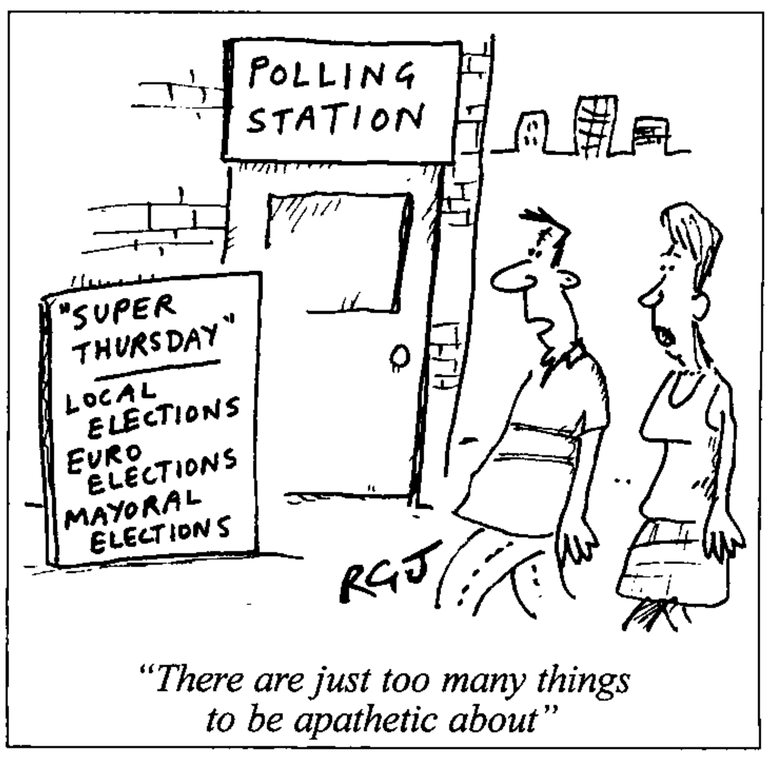
How They Celebrated – The Eye Takes A Panoramic View Of The 100 New Countries That Now Make Up The United States Of Europe

IN USTINOV, the capital of **Kovonia** (pop. 7302), colourfully dressed folk dancers joined together in the *Kornakova* to express their joy at Europe's day of destiny.

IN THE mountains of **Euthanasia** (pop. 3), colourfully dressed folk dancers celebrated their entry by eating platefuls of their traditional national cheese, *rumpelstiltskin*, which they are confident will soon become the favourite dish on Europe's breakfast tables.

COLOURFULLY dressed folk dancers from the forests of **Tesconia** (pop. 300 million) flocked into the central square of their capital Azda to toast "the new era of political and economic cooperation" in flagons of *shrek*, a highly alcoholic brandy-type drink distilled from cabbages.

IN **Great Britain,** millions of people colourfully dressed in their traditional national costume (jeans, t-shirts, trainers) turned on their televisions to see that the BBC was broadcasting round-the-clock folk-dancing to celebrate Europe's new dawn instead of the final of the Embassy Snooker *(contd p. 94)*



"There are just too many things to be apathetic about"

● How did you celebrate on 1 May? If you would like to join the great Euro Festival, visit us now at www.zzzzz.co.eu

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

CHRIS PATTEN

Mr Patten, as an EU Commissioner, how do you see the future of spoons?

Well, this is obviously a very exciting moment, a real turning point in history – with all sorts of new spoons being brought together in one big drawer! Different shapes, different sizes, some big, some small, but all at last unmistakably belonging to the same family of spoons!

Some people are saying that we've got enough spoons and we don't need anymore?

There are always people like that, at any time in history. People who are frightened of the future, They can only cling on to the spoons they are used to and that they grew up with. "Little Spooners", I call them. There are all these marvellous spoons out there, and they just don't want to know, it's a bit sad really.

But why now particularly? What's the big rush?

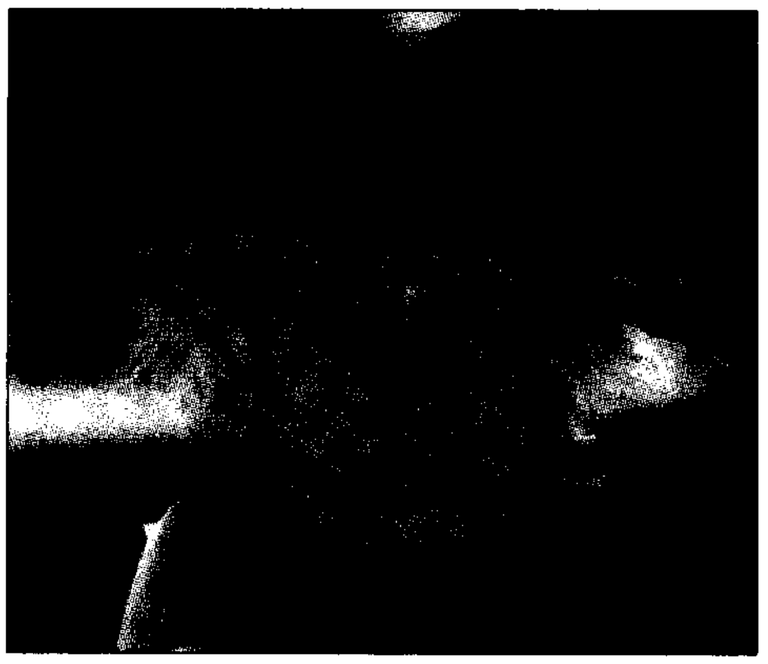
If we don't move now, we're going to be left behind spoon-wise! You can't just sit on the sidelines watching other people eat their soup and stir their coffee. You have to get in there and grasp the spoon while you can. The alternative is to be left out in the cold, as the only person at the table without a spoon. I'm sure none of us want that!

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I once had this very valuable Chinese spoon and I gave it away! Ha, ha, ha!

NEXT WEEK: Monsieur Le Pen "Me and Ma Plume".

DIARY



SIR PEREGRINE WORSTHORNE: IN DEFENCE OF ARISTOCRACY

I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that the English aristocracy has given birth to all the world's greatest and noblest minds, men without whose breeding and intelligence the human race would still be splashing about in some ghastly over-heated swamp in the very belly of darkest Africa as ill-shod toads *, peevish lizards or vulgar jelly-fish.

I know that whereof I speak, for I was myself born into the very bosom of the aristocracy. As is well-known in aristocratic circles, my great-grandmother's second husband had a third cousin who was an Anstruther of Godalming. The Anstruthers stand as the veriest beacons of the hereditary principle, having given over their lives to looking after the people of Godalming, supplying them with nutritious scraps in cold spells and taking them to court only when the subsequent bills have remained unpaid.

I have often heard it said, and sometimes within earshot of the upper echelons of respectable society, that two and two make four. Yet this is quite plainly not the case. How could two and two possibly make four when it is so obvious to one and all that they make six? To put it simply, if I have two snuff boxes in my left hand, and two snuff boxes in my right hand, the total number of snuff boxes I have in both hands is six. Or to translate the same truth into the characteristically modish and inelegant language of "numbers" favoured by the more churlish mathematicians:

2+2 = 6 **

Point proven. Yet our present system of 'egalitarian' government, by which is really meant totalitarian rule by the proletarian hordes (many if not most of whom have dandruff) has convinced generations of citizens (their shoes in grave need of a polish) that the equation 2 + 2 = 4 can somehow be made to hold water. Down this path lies madness. Next, they will be telling us that one and one makes two!!!

This grave mathematical deception, from which floweth the depraved and decadent condition of England today, must needs rightly be placed at the feet of Harold Wilson, who, far from being an aristocrat, was the product of inferior breeding, misusing the adverb "hopefully" and never learning to hold his pipe in a manner befitting a gentleman.***

And, forsooth, how much has changed! When I first joined The Times as an apprentice leader-writer in 1950, all journalists on that newspaper were expected, quite rightly, to don top hat and tails at all times. Nor were we permitted to write our own articles, for it was considered an activity unfit for a gentleman. Instead, the necessary pieces were written for us by uniformed parlour maids, whom we would tip generously (sixpence ha'penny every Christmas) for their troubles. Never let it be said that there was a jot or tittle of snobbery about this. Like slavery, it was valued equally on both sides, allowing them to look up to us and, at one and the same time, us to look down on them.

Nowadays, to my certain knowledge, The Times is staffed almost exclusively by common people, many bussed in from the East End in boilersuits. Even Lord Rees-Mogg is obliged to adopt a flat cap, grubby overalls and a cockney accent before reporting for work. And a certain coarseness has crept into the prose. For instance, leading articles on the situation in Iraq invariably begin with the lamentable phraseology, "Fuck this for a game of soldiers". It all goes to show that equality may be a good thing in theory, but, like mathematics, it never works in practice.

Why are we so embarrassed by the notion of an aristocracy? Many of the most notable thinkers and philanthropists down the ages have been drawn from the aristocracy. Did not Lord Jesus Christ hold a title? **** And so too, in more recent times, do the Dukes of Hazzard. But since the war, successive shabby governments, preaching a meritocracy borne of envy and rancour, have seen to it that the aristocracy must huddle together in darkened rooms. Standards everywhere have thus slipped. Footballers no longer pass the ball in a gentlemanly fashion to their opponents, but seek instead to kick it into the goalmouth with brute force. Only yesterday, I heard of a youth who was not sporting a necktie on the "tube" train, yet will not face prosecution. Worse still, on the afternoon of September 11th 2001, I remember watching the television in mounting horror at the sight of the Mayor of New York appearing in public in a baseball cap.

Paradoxically, black is in fact white, and it follows on from there that white is black. It's as plain as the nose on the back of my hand. Yet egalitarian hypocrisy ensures that our children are taught the opposite, that in some strange way white is white, and black is black, and that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs. If truth be told, my cousin the 4th Earl of Hartlepool assures me that he regularly makes an omelette without breaking eggs; he also takes care to employ too many cooks in order to improve his broth. In better days, he would have been appointed First Lord of the Treasury, and a very good thing too. As it is, he is bound into a straitjacket in a cripplingly expensive private rest home, yet another victim of this government's war against its social and intellectual superiors.

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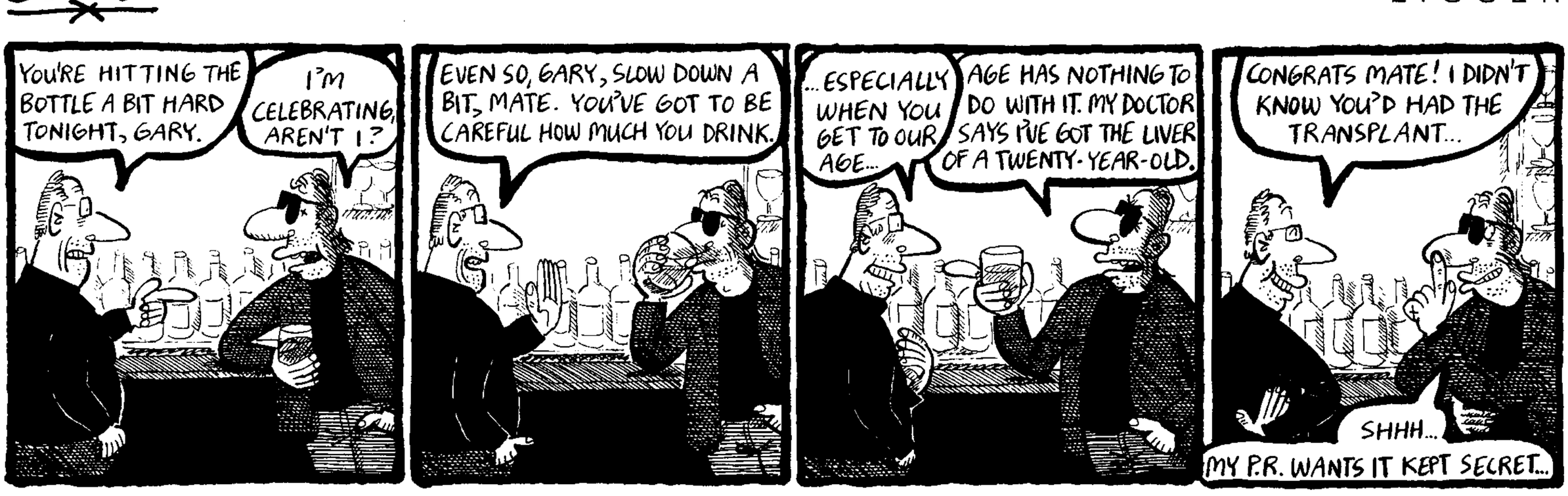
* The natterjack toad, an ancestor of the Earl and Countess of Natterjack, is the exception that proves the rule, being exceedingly good company, an animal of proven nobility, both genetic and moral, and a member of White's.

** I am indebted to Professor Albert Einstein, a distant cousin of my stepmother's father-in-law, the 3rd Earl of Bessborough, for this information, for which I am happy to credit his tremendously brainy if overlong work "The Meaning of Relativity". Though Einstein persists in maintaining, for the most part, that two and two do indeed make four, I took from my reading his book an entirely different lesson.

*** Wilson was once in attendance at a luncheon reception at which I was a guest; I noticed with horror that, imbibing his soup, he scooped his spoon towards him rather than away. The very next day, I saw it as no less than my duty to pen a passionate editorial column in which, having revealed this revolting social solecism, I called for his immediate resignation. This call, widely criticised at the time, nevertheless proved effective. Eigheen months later, Wilson resigned.

**** His mother, Lady Mary, was one of the Virgins of Derbyshire, her family having been drawn to the Middle East by the clement climate some years previously.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


YOU'RE HITTING THE BOTTLE A BIT HARD TONIGHT, GARY.
I'M CELEBRATING, AREN'T I?
EVEN SO, GARY, SLOW DOWN A BIT, MATE. YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFUL HOW MUCH YOU DRINK.
...ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU GET TO OUR AGE...
AGE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. MY DOCTOR SAYS I'VE GOT THE LIVER OF A TWENTY-YEAR-OLD.
CONGRATS MATE! I DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D HAD THE TRANSPLANT...
SHHH...
MY P.R. WANTS IT KEPT SECRET...

Literary Review

Thick and thin

Bergdorf Blondes
Plum Sykes
(Viking, £10)

WHAT bliss! Finally, a chick lit novel about a heroine with no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Moi, of course!

Yours truly is this champagne bubble of a girl about town, living the perfect New York party girl life. And all my friends are like these Park Avenue Princesses, who like spend all day getting their eyebrows waxed while texting their personal shoppers and exchanging tips about the dermatologists where they get their effortless botox smiles done, and but like what they all really want is to find that elusive PH (prospective husband) with a PJ (private jet).

Naturally they're all pretty, thin blondes (pretty thick actually, and not very naturally since they have their colour retouched every 13 days exactly) and très glamorous it goes without saying (though I do say it over and over so you don't forget).

For example: my best friend Julie Bergdorf who's a department store heiress (obviously) and who, despite having a personal shopper, likes to do her own shoplifting, just for kicks, and oh yes, because she just had to have the latest Hermès Birkin, you know the new ostrich one in baby pink with the white trim? Which she could like totally afford anyway. Only there's a three-year wait list. And she gets arrested and it like gets into the newspapers, which is crazy when you think about it (only of course she never does) since it's her daddy's store anyway, so she's like stealing from herself. Yet her daddy's like totally delighted because of all the PR for the store!

Well, Julie has contracted "fiancé fever" and I agree to help find her a PH. So we attend all these wonderful glam parties and guess what, it's me that gets the PH! He's this beyond cute Jude Law-type called Zach who just sits there smouldering his unconventional good looks and asking yours truly if she's the wittiest girl in New York or the prettiest or like both? Which for a girl like moi is more than enough to let him take me home and get his head into my South American region.

A word of explanation. (My novel, or novelty, is full of little asides like this, and lists and glossaries, to help my less than totally hip readers find their way round what must seem rather alien territory.) There's a bikini wax and then there's a Brazilian, which is like so extreme it involves removing practically all the hair down there. And hence my various references to Latin activities and the Amazonian jungle. Because I'm way too virginal to describe anything so vulgar as a sexual act in my novelty. Eeuw! That would be beyond icky.

Not that good taste has much to do with it. Otherwise I would not make all the jokes I do about how great it is to be "ana", ie anorexic, but in a great supermodel way, ie thin to perfection, not "in a bad Karen Carpenter way". Or how "the hottest sample sales in New York are so fraught with danger they make the Gaza Strip look peaceful." Later I opine that "an orgasm really is the answer to almost every problem in life. I honestly believe that if everyone was having orgasms regularly there wouldn't be a Palestinian conflict." No way.

Well to cut a long story short Zach dumps me for this exotic smoky-eyed model while I'm on a shopping trip to Paris with my friend Julie and I suffer such a Shame Attack that I decide to end it all with an overdose (Advil washed down with Bellini, of course). Luckily I'm staying at the Ritz since I wouldn't be seen dead in a bathrobe from any other hotel. Literally!

But then this funny sweet hunky movie director called Charlie who's supposed to be going out with Julie comes into my suite and saves me with a stern lecture about how selfish I am and later he turns out to be the lord of the manor back in England where I grew up so he's the boy next door after all (sorry did I spoil the surprise) and we all live happily ever after, even Julie who has found another PH conveniently. So it's Bellinis and tiramisu (that's another code word for sex) all round.

All right, all right. So what if it's a pretty thin plot about a pretty, thin girl? So what if the reader knows, once one of my characters has "wailed", that another will pretty soon have "trilled". So what if I mangle my syntax and everything is hilariously (if not redundantly) exaggerated, so I say things like that "Mascara clots are a federal crime round here" (unlike shoplifting evidently) and "there are killer dresses and there are killer dresses by Alaia, which are so killer they're homicidal."

Isn't it way cool enough to drop such like totally canonical names as Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath and Anita (not Rebecca!) Loos into the text to give it a bit of literary cachet? Whatever. I'd like to thank my editors at *American Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* and all those lovely smart people at Miramax, and in case you were wondering I like totally do have even my backup dress planned for the movie premier which must surely follow. This is très chic lit, girls. Geddit? I wouldn't bother actually.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"This summer, green is the new black." — Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian.*

"Wedge sandals are the new flip flops." — Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian.*

"Marks & Spencer is the new Topshop." — Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian.*

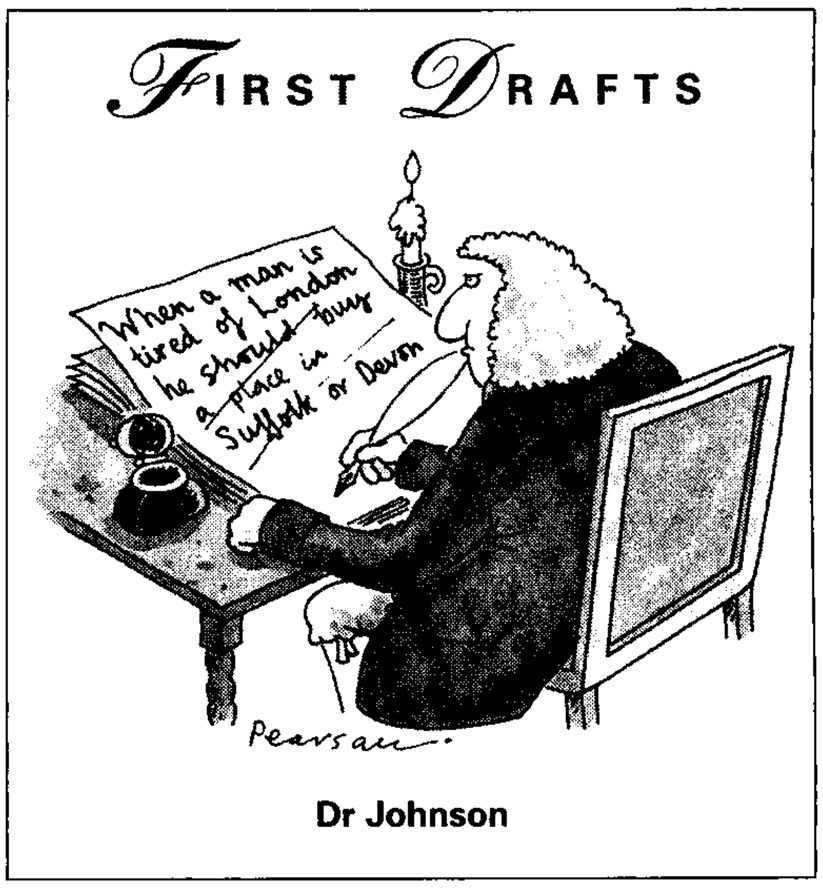
"Clothes are the new naked." — *BBC Breakfast.*

"Sunlight is fast becoming the new tobacco." — *Evening Standard.*

"Corporate social responsibility is the new corporate environmentalism." — *Observer.*

"Fat is the new black." — Vicky Swindon, BBC Radio 2.

"Slow is the new fast." — *Marketing* magazine.



FIRST DRAFTS

Dr Johnson

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE Ottaker's chain has carried off the Bookseller of the Year title at the Nibbies for the second year running. But company founder and md James Heneage is reportedly puzzled by a staff survey showing that his booksellers feel deep loyalty to their shops but none at all to head office.

Perhaps he should look at the disparity between the salaries of those at the Salisbury HQ (where Heneage is on £126,000 a year, plus bonuses) and those on the shop floor, some of whom receive less than a tenth of Heneage's basic. One poor member of the infantry estimated that after accommodation and bills, some staff were left with just £10 a week for food.

Of Heneage's well-paid lieutenants, those in marketing come in for particular scorn, arranging grand campaigns like the Real Read but failing to arrange sufficient stock, leading to lost sales and red faces at the tills.

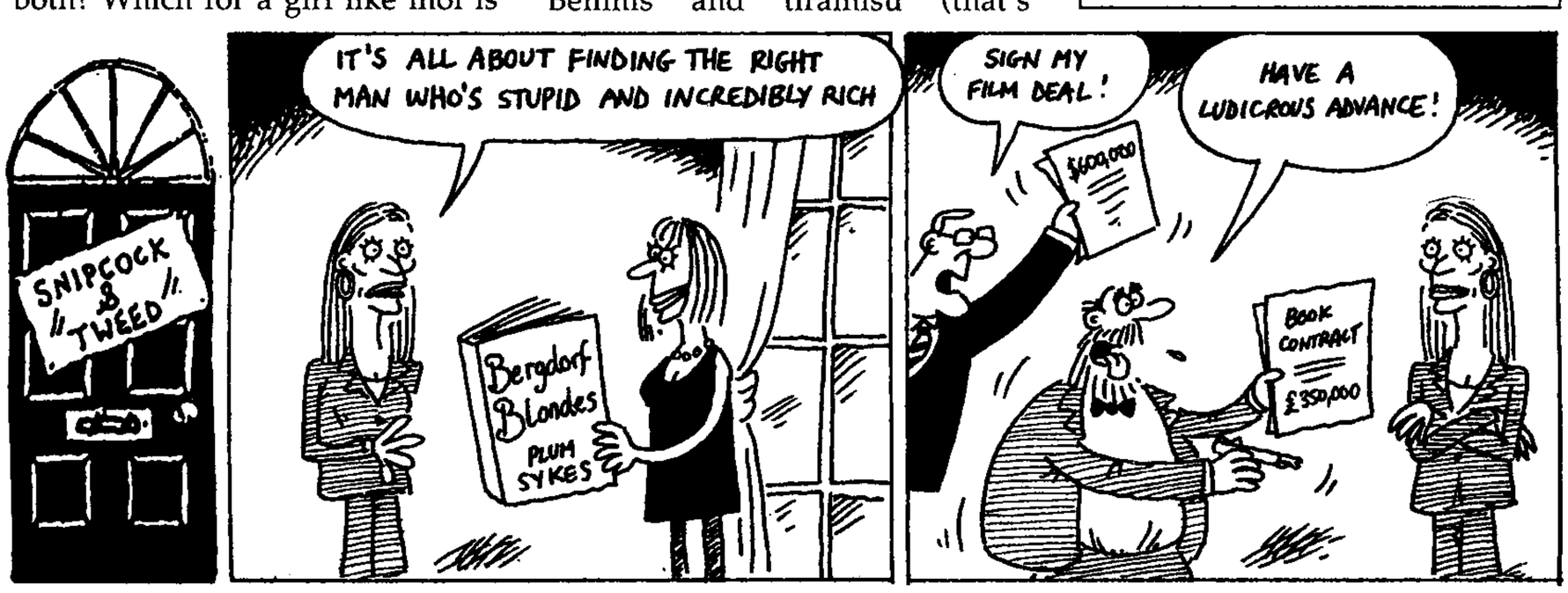
If the company were in dire straits, perhaps the breadline salaries could be understood. But it has just announced that turnover rose 34 percent to £154m last year, while pre-tax profits were up 20 percent to £6m – quite an achievement considering the cost of purchasing and integrating the Hammicks shops into the chain.

■ WHEN W.H. Smith held a big press conference recently, it decided to have lots of books lying around in the hope that people would believe the company was still interested in selling them.

However, three dump bins provided by publishers were turned away on the grounds that the titles would not suit the occasion. They were Anthony Sampson's *Who Runs This Place?*; *Bad Men* by John Connolly and Jeffery Deaver's *The Vanished Man.*

■ INSIDERS are claiming that the funny money season has started again for autobiography. After Rageh Omaar was apparently paid £800,000, Jon Snow has been offered £500,000 and there is talk that Sean Connery's life story is going for £3 million. Can these figures be right?

'Bookworm'



WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Lighthousekeeping

Jeanette Winterson

(Fourth Estate, £15)

My name is Sparkle, and I was born out of an egg on the summit of a tall mountain in the middle of a thunderstorm. The lightning cracked, the shell splintered and out I stepped into the black, windy world. That's what tends to happen in the works of female novelists who read too much Angela Carter when young.

*

I have no father. There's nothing unusual about that. Not in this kind of book. My mother raised me in a house on the cliff so high that we roved here and there by hot air balloon. From which dirigible she fell one day, leaving me an orphan. To be nurtured by old Miss Grim from the village, a woman as sober as a ham-sandwich, as charmless as a frost and as blind as a paperclip.

We were never going to get on, so I left. I went north, south, east and west. Into my story.

*

Tell me a story.

What kind of a story?

Well, just a short one like this with a few words nicely arranged in the centre of the page.

Why?

That way there's less of it to write. And you'll be finished sooner.

*

Stories are funny things. They are, though. Sometimes they go on for ever. Other times they just stop. You can look out for them all day and not find one. And then suddenly a dozen will turn up when you least expect them.

A bit like buses.

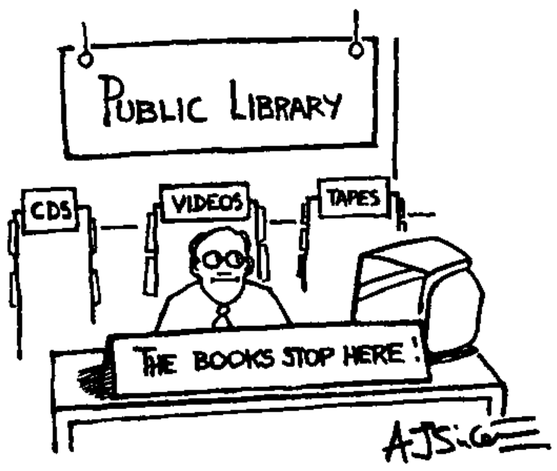
*

Here I am, edging over the rim of my young life. With Miss Grim, Old Pew, Uncle Tom Cobbley and the others. Naturally I fell in love. What else do you do? For love knows no bounds. Love is better than a Mars Bar. Love can't be bought, sold or sent out to the shops on a rainy day. It's the tops, love is. When I fell in love with you I invited you to my crash pad in the forest where the dew gleamed on the grass, we wrestled through the dawn like amorous seals and our clavicles rubbed furtively together like a handful of broken biscuits [*continues*]

*

Tell me another story.

Well, once there was a girl called Jeanette, who wrote a book called *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, which everyone liked. After that she wrote a lot of other books which people didn't like quite so much. And that's the end of the story.



LIBRARY NEWS

■ READERS in Cambridge, looking forward to their swanky new central Lion Yard library, are in for a disappointment. When the library building opens in 2007 it will have a grand total of, er, *no* new books.

County councillors blame a lack of central government funds to invest in book stocks and say they hope more cash will be available in three years' time. The news illustrates perfectly the findings of a report last month by former Waterstone's boss Tim Coates for charity Libri. It concluded that if things go on as they are, the public library will vanish from British life by 2020.

The report says that to attract more people library opening hours should be akin to major bookstores and users should have a better chance of finding the book they are looking for. At present the odds of finding the right book are just over one in two for the average user.

Coates wants to see spending on books tripled. He says libraries could do this within their existing budgets if they were not wasting funds on pointless bureaucracy. He says antiquated practices mean buying, cataloguing and processing a £10 book into library stock costs up to £24; and he points to the spending on hundreds of new bar codes, created and pasted into books which already have usable barcodes printed on the back by the publishers.

In London 14 public libraries have closed since 1999. In some of the city's boroughs, as little as 3 percent of the library budget is spent on buying books. But not all is gloom and doom. In book-obsessed Hay-on-Wye, report Powys librarians, library use keeps going up and up, despite the plethora of second-hand bookstores.

Warballs

"*Friends* has always made me forget about the world and all its human sufferage [*sic*] that man has created every time I watch it. I'm 52 and have a life, but *Friends* always puts me in a happy place, especially after 9/11. To me, the Twin Towers are an icon of *Friends*. After the tradgedy [*sic*], of course, life will never be the same… When you watch the reruns and don't see the Twin Towers in the skyline you know just about what year it was filmed… Thank you *Friends* for making life beautiful!!!!" — BBC News online, "*Friends* finale: your views".

"Consultation Paper on Court Working Dress in England and Wales. Changes to consultation period... The consultation was to have been published in late March [2003]. However, owing to the start of the war in Iraq the Lord Chancellor decided it would be inappropriate to publish the consultation paper at that time." — Circular to lawyers from lord chancellor's department.

"By far the largest painting will be the pale *Still Life* executed in 2002, hovering like a bleached-out image of a water-jug and fruit in an otherwise blank expanse of whiteness. 'My wife and I were in Chicago when 9/11 happened,' he recalls. 'I wanted to do something but the subject was so visually strong in itself that I couldn't touch it. So I went back to an idyllic still life with a twist, like Manet in reverse, and by enlarging the banality it floats in emptiness. The whole image is there, but deconstructed and oversize so that it's very difficult to apprehend.'" — Interview with artist Luc Tuymans, the *Times*.

... [Sam] Taylor-Wood's image is almost transgressive in its intimacy…The image is also unashamedly beautiful. Beckham's limbs and face are warmly lit, looming out of a Caravaggio-esque gloom. The curves of his musculature and honeyed tone of his skin are sensuously conveyed. This is a David as physically perfect as Michaelangelo's.

CHARLOTTE HIGGINS on the 107 minute film of David Beckham asleep
Guardian

The names ffinlo and Costain are both names from the Isle of Man. ffinlo is of Celtic origin and is spelt correctly with two small "f"s in order to make the celtic sound "eff". Costain is of Viking origin, and means "son of Thor". Like his namesake ffinlo hopes to serve a hammer blow to the Tories in North East Cambridgeshire.

Biography of prospective Labour parliamentary candidate fffinlo Costain

Pseuds Corner

Earlier this month the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, said that the term "multiculturalism" ought to be dropped and in its place we should refer to "core British values." He was criticised for suggesting that Shakespeare and Dickens represented Britishness – but he should have suggested Beckham. He transcended his sport, his nation, his gender and even his race…And, like Elvis, Beckham's appeal was that he could be what he wanted him to be. [*continues*]

SARFRAZ MANZOOR
Guardian

Truth, Burkett believes, is something you don't often get in art. "The best you can hope for is to give the audience honesty and ownership. I extend a hand to them, in effect saying if you will breathe with me in the dark for a couple of hours and let me control your breathing, I will try and make it worth your while."

LYN GARDNER interviews Canadian puppeteer RONNIE BURKETT
Guardian

Both Craig and I will be buried there too [an organically certified orchard]. I really like the idea of becoming a tree. I do! I think it's the ultimate in recycling.

AMI RAPHAEL interviews organic food gurus JO FAIRLEY and CRAIG SAMS
Observer Food Monthly

A couple of seasons ago, after a particularly ungreat showing, a Sky interviewer jabbed the mic in front of a breathless Thierry Henry and asked him what went wrong. Usually Henry treats the language as if it has to be dribbled with – sprinting, darting and twisting – but on this occasion he shrugged, looked beyond the interviewer and then beyond the camera and said: "I was not there."

It was the day existentialism arrived at Highbury…[*continues*]

MICHAEL ROSEN
Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

If you can imagine at the end of the day, coming out of the sea with salty hair and a tightish sun-tanned face and walking into a beach bar surrounded by people having a good time with music playing and laughter, then if you could bottle up that feeling – **that's the essence of our company**.

From the Joe Brown's Adventure Clothing and Accessories website

CONTRIBUTORS: J.W. Byrom, Jo Sole, Chris Gibson, Matthew Lawrence, APR, Keith Kennedy, Dominic Herrington.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

WORD IN YOUR SHELL-LIKE

THE Shell scandal is turning into a scandal for the British government too as it emerges how "new" Labour tried to undermine the American law that finally forced Shell to admit it had been lying about its oil reserves.

After lobbying by Shell, Tony Blair's government made representations about the Sarbanes-Oxley act, a piece of US anti-fraud legislation covering, among other things, public disclosure of financial information.

According to a report by Shell lawyers, because of the new law Walter Van de Vijver, head of Shell exploration, was reluctant to massage the figures. In October 2002 he emailed Watts to say: "I must admit that I [have] become sick and tired of arguing about the hard facts, given where we are today. If I was interpreting the disclosure requirements literally (Sarbanes-Oxley Act, etc) we would have a real problem."

In Britain, the Labour government wanted British firms to be exempt from Sarbanes-Oxley provisions. Last year department of trade minister Melanie Johnson told parliament she had lobbied over the act in the US following contacts from big business.

Amazingly, Tony Blair even asked the US president to exempt UK firms from some Sarbanes-Oxley provisions.

The DTI refused to tell the *Eye* whether Shell was one of the firms "making representation" over Sarbanes-Oxley, saying this was confidential; and Shell itself failed to respond to *Private Eye*'s questions on Sarbanes-Oxley.

Shell suits

MEANWHILE the search goes on for who is to blame for the scandalous overestimate of Shell's oil reserves.

The former chairman and other directors have resigned, but the securities and exchange commission in the US is not satisfied. It wants to ask awkward questions of the accountants involved in auditing the relevant Shell accounts: KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

Shell's own report, commissioned from the US law firm Davis Polk, revealed that overbooking reserves was possible "because of certain deficiencies in the company's controls" and because "the internal reserves audit function was understaffed and undertrained".

The SEC's further inquiries might uncover yet another case of conflict of interest between the duties of an auditor and the fat fees the same firm might reap from more lucrative consultancy work. In 2002, the US government introduced strict rules to put a stop to such conflicts, but the "new" Labour government, in permanent awe of the big accountancy firms, studiously avoided following suit.

For the record, the latest Shell accounts show the following payments to KPMG and PwC. For auditing, £25m; for non-audit (consultancy) work: £35m. In any event Shell are unlikely to be nominated for this year's "Telling It Like It Is" prize for corporate reporting, launched last year by PwC — or for the new Laureate Award for Business Ethics, launched in January by KPMG.

TAX AVOIDANCE

Earns & Young

DEEPLY disturbed by the rise in tax avoidance, the government has gone on the offensive.

According to the *Financial Times* on 4 May, the treasury is directing a "tax probe" against 30 companies – but especially against top accountant Ernst & Young which, the Inland Revenue claims, "distinguishes itself as the big four's most aggressive promoter of abusive tax avoidance schemes".

In particular the Revenue was shocked by a single scheme based on "unusual transactions in derivatives known as currency swaps". The scheme punched holes in the 2002 finance act and lost the government £1bn. It was dreamed up in the imaginative tax avoidance department of… Ernst & Young.

While the treasury was "cracking down" on Ernst & Young, however, Jim Cousins, Labour MP for Newcastle Central, asked a) how much the government had paid in fees to the big four accountancy firms, including Ernst & Young and b) how many top people from the firms had been taken on as "secondees" to government departments. The answers were astonishing: a) £10m to Ernst & Young in three years; and b) five senior people at the DTI of "assistant director level or above" were "seconded" from Ernst & Young to government departments, and there was even an E&Y "secondee" working at a very high level in the treasury's budget and finance directorate – the section that advises on tax and tax avoidance.

Mr Cousins asked another question. How many accounting firms had been banned from government work? "None," was the answer. This question was prompted perhaps by the ban promptly imposed by the previous Tory government on Arthur Andersen as punishment for ripping off taxpayers through its client John de Lorean.

The amounts Ernst & Young ripped off the taxpayer are by any measure far greater than anything that happened in the de Lorean scandal, but the position seems to be that while under the Tories accountants who ripped off taxpayers were banned from government work, under "new" Labour they are welcomed into senior government positions, including those dealing with tax.

● **THOUGH £27,251 must be peanuts to a multi-millionaire tennis champion like Andre Agassi, that didn't stop him and his tax advisers at Tenon trying to dodge responsibility for that amount in tax.**

In 1999 Agassi got a tax demand on money he'd earned in Britain playing at Wimbledon and in sponsorship fees from sports equipment giants Nike and Head. He refused to pay, saying that the money had been paid to him from a firm outside Britain.

The case finally ground its way to the high court last month, where Mr Justice Lightman threw Agassi's case out on the rather obvious grounds that "it would be absurd to attribute to the legislature the intention that liability could in any and all cases be avoided by the simple expedient of channelling the payment through a foreign company with no tax presence here. If this were the case, the tax would effectively become voluntary."

REBUILDING IRAQ

The quality of mercenaries

IT'S not just the Americans who are having to answer questions about their hired hands in Iraq.

Last month Shia militia in Kut killed Gray Branfield of the Hart Group, a Bermuda-registered security firm run by former SAS and Scots Guards officer Richard Bethell, son of Lord Westbury. Following his death, it emerged that Barnfield had been involved in much unsavoury work in South Africa's covert wars.

A detective inspector in the Rhodesian police specialising in "counter insurgency", he joined the South African defence force's "project barnacle" to fight a secret war against the ANC. He planned the 1982 raid on Maseru in Lesotho: an attempt to assassinate Chris Hani which claimed 42 deaths, including five women and two children. He also helped plan a 1985 raid on "ANC targets" in Gabarone, Botswana, in which South African commandos killed 13 people, including three women and a six-year-old.

In 1998 he led a raid on Zimbabwe's Chikurubi prison to free five South African agents who had car-bombed an ANC office there. (The would-be assassins duped an unemployed man into driving the rigged car to the ANC offices and the driver, killed by the remote control bomb, was the only fatality.) Branfield's raid to free the bombers was aborted and they remain in prison.

Simon Faulkner, of the Hart Group, told the *Eye* Branfield's background was "complete news to me". He added: "If I knew the person I interviewed had a background of any illegality or assassinations I would not have hired him." Branfield died when he and five fellow guards were attacked by around 60 militia men. He was killed while negotiating his men's successful release.

Meanwhile the Armor Group – which funds the Foreign Policy Centre, a think tank with Tony Blair as sponsor – managed to send a former Royal Marine to work as a guard for Bechtel in Iraq despite his prison record for helping loyalist terrorists in Northern Ireland.

Derek William Adgey, jailed for four years in 1995 on 10 counts of soliciting murder, had passed army intelligence files to help Johnny "Mad Dog" Adair's Ulster Freedom Fighters to target their attacks. After soldiers in Iraq recognised Adgey in February, he was sent home.

POLICE 5

Lap of honour

VICE-SQUAD police dropped their objections to a new licence for London's Spearmint Rhino lap-dancing club after the appointment of a fine, upstanding citizen as its new boss.

Former Detective Chief Superintendent Graham Melvin was appointed boss of the chain's UK flagship branch just in time for a crunch meeting with Camden council's licensing panel. The club had been at risk of losing its permission for public entertainment after its manager Les Pierce resigned in January, giving no reason for his departure in his letter to bosses.

As a former licensing officer, Mr Pierce's management was itself a condition imposed by magistrates after a high-profile court case in March last year in which it was alleged that dancers were flouting decency rules and making offers of prostitution. The existing licensees were removed.

Graham Melvin led the investigation into the murder of PC Keith Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm riots of 1985 — an investigation which led to the wrongful conviction of Winston Silcott. When the conviction was quashed in 1991, thanks to forensic evidence that notes of interviews, carried out by Melvin and used in the trial, had been fabricated, Melvin was suspended (*Eyes passim*). In 1994 a court cleared him of perjury and fabricating evidence against Silcott, but Silcott was, nevertheless, given £50,000 compensation by the Met.

MMR

Aid runs dry

EVER since legal aid was withdrawn from families who believe their children's autism and gut disease were triggered by the MMR triple vaccine, a question mark has hung over 300 further cases involving children with other conditions said to have been caused by the jab.

Now the legal services commission (LSC) has written to the parents of these children – they suffer disabling illnesses including epilepsy, childhood arthritis and sensorineural or nerve damage deafness – saying it is minded to cancel their legal aid as well.

The LSC said that "any case involving other conditions (ie not autism and associated bowel disease) has no reasonable prospect of success as there is insufficient evidence of a causal connection between the vaccination and the condition complained of".

This is curious because these cases have never been properly investigated. Four years ago, Mr Justice Bell, the judge then in the MMR class litigation, decided that the court should concentrate on the largest number of children, those with regressive autism and bowel disease. All the other cases went on the back burner while legal and scientific resources went exclusively into the eight lead autistic cases.

Although the autism cases were the most difficult to pursue scientifically in proving a link with the triple jab, other families were happy to sit back and wait knowing that eventually their cases would be heard. They are now furious their claims may not get a public hearing — especially as they maintain it is easier to prove a link between their children's conditions and MMR.

Many of the conditions complained of — including encephalitis, the paralysing Guillain-Barre syndrome, arthritis and pancreatitis – appear in the vaccine manufacturers' own literature and datasheets as possible but rare complications. Further, about 200 of the claims relate directly to two early brands of MMR which contained the now-banned urabe strain mumps vaccine. They were both withdrawn by the government in 1992 after they were found to be triggering viral meningitis in children.

The other cases include Vicky Brown (not her real name), now 13. At 13 months and a few days after receiving the Pluserix Urabe-containing jab, she became very ill and feverish and was screaming incessantly. She was treated with antibiotics and recovered but was left with sensorineural deafness in her left ear. This kind of nerve damage deafness is a recognised side effect of mumps meningitis. The government's own vaccine damage payment unit has paid out in cases of sensorineural deafness after MMR vaccination.

Her family and others are now asking the LSC to continue their legal aid funding, saying that further work which would support or contradict their claims of vaccine damage has never been carried out, let alone presented; and the commission's conclusions, on the back of the very different autism cases, is therefore premature.

PS: Lovells, the solicitors acting for Merck, one of the three defendant vaccine manufacturers, have been accused of forcing parents of autistic children into signing away any future rights to sue over MMR by threatening them with a huge bill for costs.

The solicitors have written to claimants reminding them they must sign a "notice of discontinuance" by 14 May or they may be liable for "any further costs Merck continues to incur in defending the claim".

The letter continues: "Provided that by that date you send to us a notice of discontinuance, and give an undertaking to us on behalf of (the child) not to issue any further proceedings arising out of vaccination with MMR vaccine against Merck in this or any other jurisdiction, Merck will not seek any order for their costs against (the child) or you as the litigation friend."

At least two families were so frightened of losing their homes they signed the Merck undertaking which states: "I undertake not to make another claim either in this or any other jurisdiction arising out of facts which are the same or substantially the same as those related to the discontinued claim."

GlaxoSmithKline and Aventis Pasteur have not made similar demands to the parents.

PFI 1

Gilt by association

ONE of the most obvious reasons for the disaster that is the private finance initiative (PFI) is the fact that the government can borrow more cheaply than can the private PFI companies.

Hence the government has come up with a subtle ruse to solve this – although the ruse may turn out to be even more expensive than the problem itself.

The new scheme, Credit Guarantee Finance, launched by Geoffrey Spence, head of PFI at the treasury, will be "piloted" at the new £192m Queen Alexandra Hospital development in Portsmouth. Under the scheme, the government issues gilts and lends the money they raise to "special purpose" companies set up by the PFI consortia. Thus the government borrows the money at the cheaper rates and funnels it through to the companies. Very ingenious.

Alas, even bankers and PFI advisers are sceptical about the scheme. The problem is that the government will have to insure the loan to the PFI company in order to preserve the pretence that the private sector bears the risks on PFI. And the cost of the insurance is likely to be even greater than the savings made by cheap borrowing. So not quite so ingenious after all.

PFI 2

Foreign buddies

WHEN PFI is in such obvious trouble at home, why is the government devoting so much time and effort into exporting it?

One answer may be found in the boards of the organisations that do the exporting, UK Trade International (UKTI), part of the DTI, and International Financial Services London (IFSL).

Sir Peter Mason

Sir Peter Mason, a director of UKTI, is chief executive of AMEC, a construction giant with huge PFI commitments (including the disastrous hospital in Carlisle). Another UKTI director is Peter Tibbet, who also sits on the board of IFSL, where he can benefit from the unbiased views on PFI of Mike Rake, chairman of KPMG (many millions a year advising on PFI schemes), Simon Robertson of Goldman Sachs (ditto), Brian Ivory of the Bank of Scotland (many millions a year financing PFIs), and Roy Leighton of Credit Lyonnais (ditto).

PFI SPECIAL

● Peter Coates, Deputy Head of Finance at the Department of Health has written to *Private Eye* complaining that two tables on PFI costs taken from a paper produced by University College, London and reproduced by the *Eye* are "deliberately misleading and wrong". His letter and a full defence of the tables can be found on the *Eye*'s website (www.private-eye.co.uk).

ENVIRONMENT

A burning issue

NO ONE in the country is more dedicated to a green environment than Mark Wilkinson, who makes posh kitchens in a Wiltshire factory.

In a generous appraisal of himself in the Times On Line recently, he assured readers: "I can honestly say I have never done anything for money… I learnt that if I wanted to be accepted and not be called thick and stupid as I was in school then the way lay in making things beautiful. Since then making things beautiful has almost been a neurotic compulsion, something that gives me great solace."

A few weeks ago Wilkinson wrote a letter to the 1,900 residents of the Wiltshire parish of Bromham, holding out the prospect of something very beautiful coming to the area: a waste incinerator, plus another factory and 120 low-cost housing units, powered by the incinerator.

The letter claimed the full support for the project from Wiltshire county council. But villagers, unimpressed by the proposal, soon got hold of a letter from the country council that concluded "we would not support an application". For bad measure, the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust was very much opposed to the scheme.

The annual meeting of Bromham parish council is not usually an irresistible attraction but this year 200 anxious people turned up on 27 April to vent their fury against the Beautiful Manufacturer and his incinerator. So shocked was Mr Wilkinson by the opposition he started to tell some of his neighbours he was going to drop the scheme, but would circulate it in detail anyway so that people would realise what they were missing. For some reason not all the villagers feel reassured.

ELECTRICITY

Wholesale let-down

THE public are still waiting for a report into the power cuts of last summer. A spokeswoman for Ofgem, the energy regulator, tells the *Eye* it will come soon and will be published. (It is stalled while the privatised electricity and gas monopoly, National Grid Transco, aka National Greed, sees if any of it can be cut out in the interests of commercial confidentiality.)

In the meantime, the reason for the power cuts that are certain to blight Britain more often in future is quite obvious. The wholesale price of electricity is based on the amount available (the installed capacity) compared with the amount actually used. There is every incentive for privately-owned companies like National Greed to cut the margin of available supply as low as possible. Twenty percent of what is available is just about tolerable in Britain but last year it fell to 17 percent. At that level, any unexpected surge in demand can threaten a power cut.

PS: National Greed is keen to "draw a line" under the sale of its substantial 27 percent stake in Transener, the largest transport and electricity supplier in Argentina. In 1995 National Greed bought it for $100m. Now it has sold it for $14m. A loss of that kind under public ownership would lead to a host of public questions and investigations, but in private enterprise it inspires yet more expensive investments abroad. Last October National Greed chief executive Roger Urwin (£924,000 a year) boasted an investment of £2bn a year worldwide, but forgot to say that only £300m would go on Britain's electricity network.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

SHAREHOLDERS in Sibir Energy seem to have been mugged of their stake in a valuable Siberian oil field. And their muggers would appear to have been allies of their partner, the Blue Tsar, Roman Abramovich. Welcome to business the Russian way, where the rule is always that the Russian gets the mine (or oil field) and the foreign investor gets the shaft.

Followers of Russian business in general and Roman Abramovich in particular will not be surprised. Abramovich and his friends have form for this type of very Russian business coup.

Seven years ago, after Sibneft had been privatised into the hands of Abramovich and two partners in a "loans for shares" scam which is once again under investigation in Russia, minority shareholders in its key Siberian oil producing subsidiary were given the unilateral dilution treatment. Their stake was much reduced by the issue of new shares giving Sibneft full control. They sued. Sibneft settled.

A similar crude rip-off was tried by Sibneft's now unwanted merger partner, Yukos. In 1999 Mikhail Khodorkovsky and friends arranged for a network of associated offshore companies to suddenly become shareholders in key production companies, thereby diluting the interests of Yukos minority shareholders. Again the foreign investors had to sue to block the deals and force a settlement.

Now Sibir is getting the same Siberian shaft. Russians don't believe in reinventing the wheel: the old ways are the best ways if they still work.

Shares in AIM-listed Sibir had almost trebled since last July before dealings were suspended last month on news that its stake in the Priobskoye field had mysteriously been diluted from 22.5 percent to perhaps under 1 percent by the issue of new shares. This could involve the company writing off £100m. Sibir was capitalised at just under £500m when it was suspended. On return that value is expected to be savaged.

Sibir had endeavoured to protect itself from the fate of other foreign investors by seeking political clout through allying with the Moscow city government to jointly own half the Siberian oil field with Sibneft and having Russians as major Sibir shareholders. But it would appear that was not enough — although whether Moscow city's stake has suffered a similar dilution, remains unclear. As does who received the new shares.

Sibneft insists it still only holds a 50 percent interest in the joint venture and denies any role in the dilution. But it may not be unhappy at the opportunity now presented either to obtain a bigger share of the oil field cheaply, buy out Sibir's interest at a knock down price or even obtain control of Sibir itself. A London listed vehicle could be useful for Mr Chelsea who is looking to sell his Russian assets, including his stake in Sibneft, and make investments outside Russia beyond the Premiership.

Since acquiring Chelsea a year ago Abramovich has been selling his major strategic investments in Russia, perhaps fearing the cold wind which has already swept Yukos's Khodorkovsky into jail and produced invigorated investigations of Sibneft's tax avoidance techniques and the original 1995-96 privatisation. Any sale of control of Sibneft or, assuming Yukos succeeds in maintaining the merger Abramovich no longer wants, his Yukos shares to a French or American buyer, is certain to require Kremlin approval. So cash and assets outside Russia could be worth a lot more than those inside — as fellow oligarchs Khodorkovsky, Vladimir Guzinsky and Abramovich's original partner in Sibneft, Boris Berezovsky, discovered too late.

Sibir may decide to challenge Sibneft in the courts but that can take forever and foreign plaintiffs rarely get a fair hearing. As a bitter Lord Browne of BP remarked four years ago about his Russian experience: "I've always considered America to be governed by laws not men. The reverse may be true in Russia." A view he is no doubt remembering as his then opponents now partners seek to rewrite their agreement to BP's suspected disadvantage.

After Abramovich and his mentor Berezovsky, plus banker Alexander Smolensky, had acquired control of Sibneft in 1997 it moved to obtain control of its 61 percent subsidiary Noyabrskneftegaz (NNG), one of the largest Russian oil producers. Abramovich was a director of NNG which issued new shares at maybe below half the market price to four companies linked to the Sibneft troika. This was done by way of a closed offer with no right to participate for existing NNG shareholders. The new NNG shares were subsequently swapped for shares in Sibneft. This manoeuvre gave Sibneft 78 percent and complete control of NNG and its revenues and assets and left the minority investors powerless. A year later Sibneft made an offer to buy out the NNG minority on what were seen as ungenerous terms.

Abramovich and Berezovsky might have got away with this scam had they not ripped off offshore tax haven (Belize)-based American plastic cup billionaire Kenneth Dart, whose love of money is only rivalled by his hatred of tax. Dart was a big investor in NNG with at least 7 percent as he was in Yukos and its associated companies. Dart had the mind and the means to fight back.

Sibneft denied any wrongdoing. The initial alleged response from its senior executives was to make comments such as "there is no law in Russia" and did not Dart realise who they were — perhaps a reference to Abramovich's reputed role as "cashier" to the family of then Russian president, Boris Yeltsin.

But Dart was undeterred — as he was two years later when he took on Yukos. He sued and lobbied publicly against Russian non-corporate governance. Despite legal defeats and support for Sibneft from stock market regulators, Dart pressed on until Sibneft settled in 1999. He was able to swap his NNG shares for 5 percent of Sibneft on much more generous terms.

Russian sources suggest this illustrates that Sibneft is typically Russian in only respecting those it cannot bully or threaten with problems from the courts or local politicians and officials — something that is all too easy to arrange in Russia as BP soon discovered and may find out again.

After BP bought into Sidanko in 1997 it suddenly found the Russian company's major oil producing subsidiary forced into a phoney, court-approved bankruptcy. The best oil field assets were then bought at well below market value by Tyumen Oil. BP hit back and eventually forged a new agreement last year with those behind Tyumen, now TNK, including the Alfa banking group led by Mikhail Fridman. But now Fridman and friends are looking to cash in the BP shares that underpin their 50 percent of the joint venture and which BP clearly saw as an insurance against a replay of what happened at Sidanko. Fridman, like Abramovich, may detect that now is a good time to be into offshore cash despite talk of needing to finance more investments in Russia.

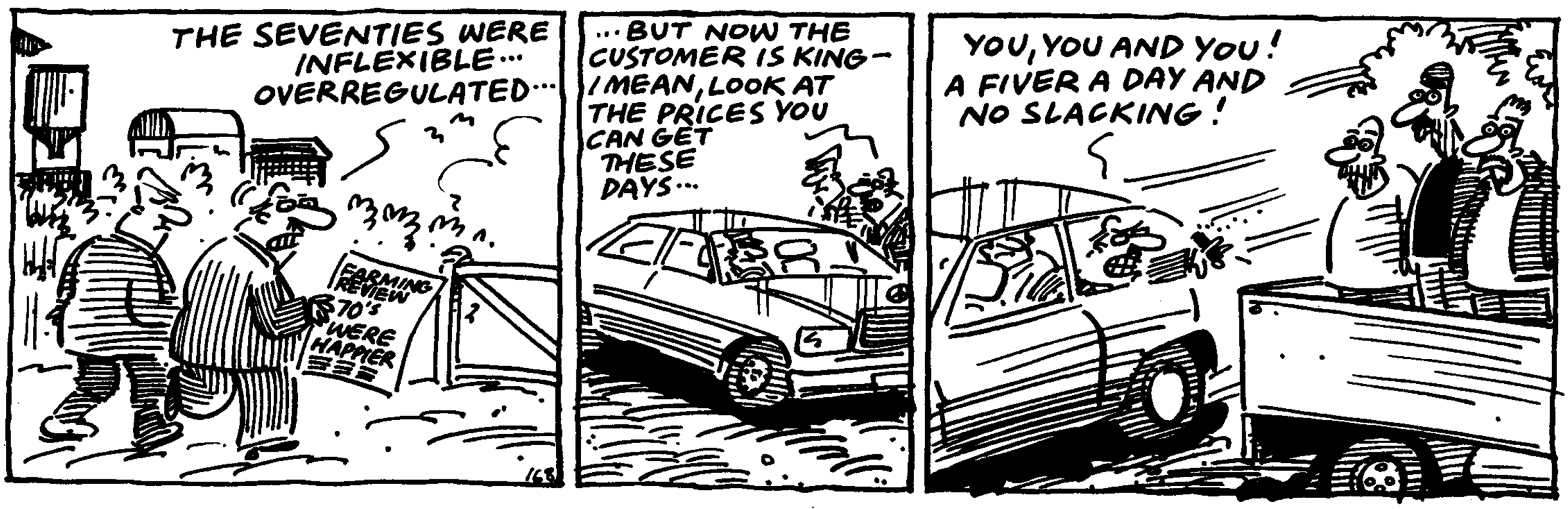
Artificially engineered bogus bankruptcies or court judgments are — like dilution — a favoured oligarch's trick. Abramovich's partner in Russian Aluminium, Oleg Deripaska, is accused of such a device in a bid to seize control of some of Russia's biggest paper mills. A small shareholder obtained judgment against the group without any notice to its controlling shareholder, Ilim Pulp. The Ilim stake was seized and sold by the Russian authorities to Deripaska. But when Deripaska went to take control his representatives decided to leave when confronted by a bigger goon squad. A legal battle continues.

The prosecutor-general has also been revisiting the Sibneft privatisation, as has the audit chamber of the Russian Federation (Moscow's equivalent of the national audit office watchdog) which reports to the Duma or Russian parliament. The audit office is expected to complete next month a review of all privatisations carried out in the ten years to 2003. Chairman Sergei Stepashin said last month that the sale of 145,000 state-owned enterprises had produced just £5.4bn — equal to what Russian tourists spent abroad last year!

Sibneft has always insisted the privatisation broke no laws; but that is not surprising as it was done with the encouragement of Yeltsin and his cronies. And as recently as last March the prosecutor-general's office indicated it had so far no evidence of any criminal offences. But what is

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


THE SEVENTIES WERE INFLEXIBLE... OVERREGULATED...
FARMING REVIEW 70's WERE HAPPIER
...BUT NOW THE CUSTOMER IS KING - I MEAN, LOOK AT THE PRICES YOU CAN GET THESE DAYS...
YOU, YOU AND YOU! A FIVER A DAY AND NO SLACKING!

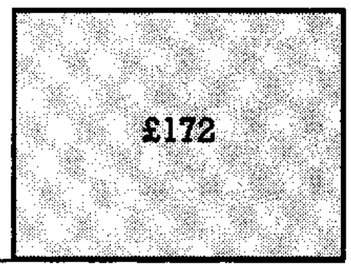
Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Some good news on the culture at last

Value of £100 invested in...

'Walkabout' Aussie slapper bars company **Regent Inns**



Local pubs and real beer company **Greene King**

beyond dispute is that the Russian public were ripped off big time when Mr Chelsea and his friends took control of Sibneft.

That verdict has already been reached by the audit chamber in a highly critical 1998 report into the Sibneft sale. It examined the process by which the state sold off first 51 percent then another 34 percent of Sibneft. This followed the bailing out of the Yeltsin government by the oligarchs and their bankers, who made loans that could not be repaid in return for shares in major Russian companies which were then to be sold to repay the loans.

There were four bidders for the 51 percent stake in December 1995. The Abramovich-Berezovsky-Smolensky group bid $100.3m, $200,000 more than a group linked to Khodorkovsky and $300,000 more than the minimum price. A third bidder recalled its bid. A fourth bidder was prevented from taking part in the auction.

"The auction was essentially not competitive," concluded the audit chamber report. The two supposedly competing banks, SBS-Agro and Menatep, had provided mutual guarantees. At the time SBS handed over the $100.3m to the ministry of finance it had $137m on deposit from the ministry. The audit chamber estimated the stake had been sold at a fraction of its real value.

There were then two further auctions of 15 percent and 19 percent stakes during 1996. The only bidders were inter-related companies linked to the Abramovich group. The 19 percent was sold for $45m and the 15 percent for $35m, both bids slightly above the minimum asking price. These auctions were also denounced as not competitive.

In 1997 the initial buyer of the 51 percent Sibneft stake auctioned the holding. Two non-Abramovich bidders were again prevented from participating. The controlling stake went to a company linked to him and Berezovsky for just $110m. The audit chamber estimated that the 51 percent had really been worth $2.8bn. One reason for that under valuation was that — unusually — Sibneft's oil reserves were not included in the minimum asking price, a giveaway of at least $500m.

The 1998 audit chamber report also identified a number of "legal violations" which made the privatisation "ineffective and financially inadequate"; and so it advised the share sales should be considered "invalid". Auditor Venjamin Sokolov, author of the 1998 report, described the Sibneft and other similar privatisations as "worthless".

No action was taken over the 1998 report but that was pre-Putin and the mood swing against the oligarchs. Now that could all change. Recently audit chamber chairman Stepashin, a public critic of Abramovich, commented when referring to his activities as governor of Chukotka and those of Sibneft that it was "difficult to apply the word ethics to certain people".

All of which will no doubt reassure shareholders in Sibir Energy. But foreign investors in Russia would do well to recall what Stalin said about elections. What matters is not who votes but who counts the votes! Especially for those who became rich the new Russian way.

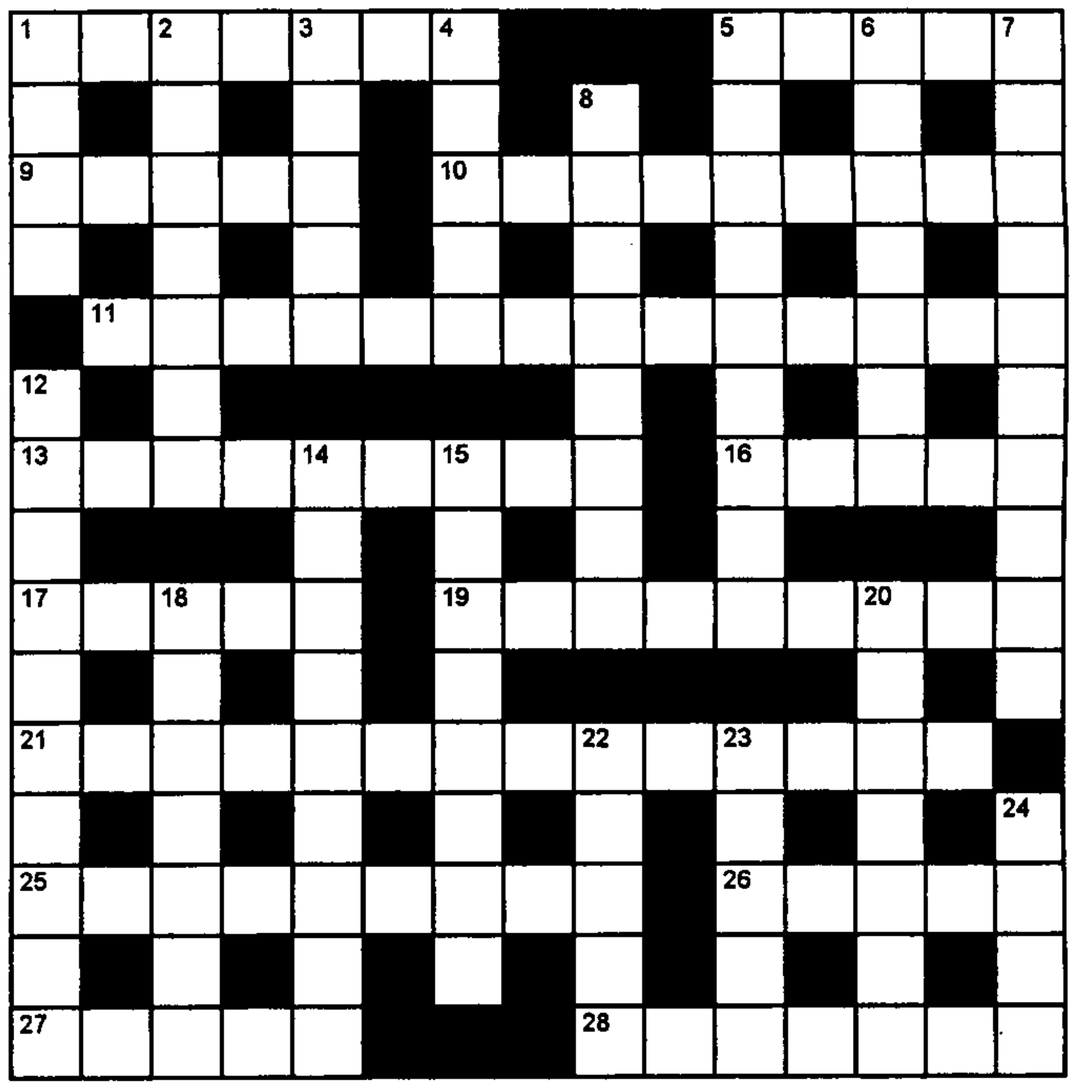
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 261

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 21 May 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/5/11 As Wilson originally said, "Half the time separating *Eye* issues occupies ages of Westminster business" (1,4,2,1,4,4,2,8)

9 Bugger King inside a banger (5)

10 Blokes love gropes, we hear – a life-changing process? (9)

11 See 1

13 Affectionate greeting for product of "mother of all weapons"? (3,2,1,3)

16 Iain's first leader of Tories accepted by Brown as an intellectual giant (5)

17 Peacekeepers attack, not ready to engage in exercise (5)

19 *Express* down in price – unconstitutional? (9)

21 Conservative after one-piece round trip, getting an eyeful (1,3,2,3,5)

25 Revolting sexual impulse isn't about squeezing centre of penis (9)

26 One employing viewers for lewd purposes (5)

27 Get the lowdown on military leader in aroused state (3,2)

28 'Yes' sod off on *Unknown Factor* epic tour (7)

DOWN

1 Time's up – SNP's leader gets in bottom (4)

2 Old boy Mark upset over Tory leader "dropping one" (7)

3 Church body's after Kinnock's head, Jack (5)

4 Come hear the hearties (5)

5 Non-elected official, Dot at centre of a leak (9)

6 Eye person topped and tailed Hislop cut-out (7)

7 Handy quality of corrupt official? (10)

8 Failure to get off with Nina, so I'm buggered (8)

12 "Kissing cousin" tag unfortunately includes Blair's second (10)

14 Knackered proper for hanging purposes (3,2,4)

15 Lagos's Americans protecting material of little substance (8)

18 Friday's child makes you shudder (7)

20 Rosy's into kinky sex – "gets rid of stale gases" (7)

22 Pissed off with Blair's no.1, a big draw nationally (5)

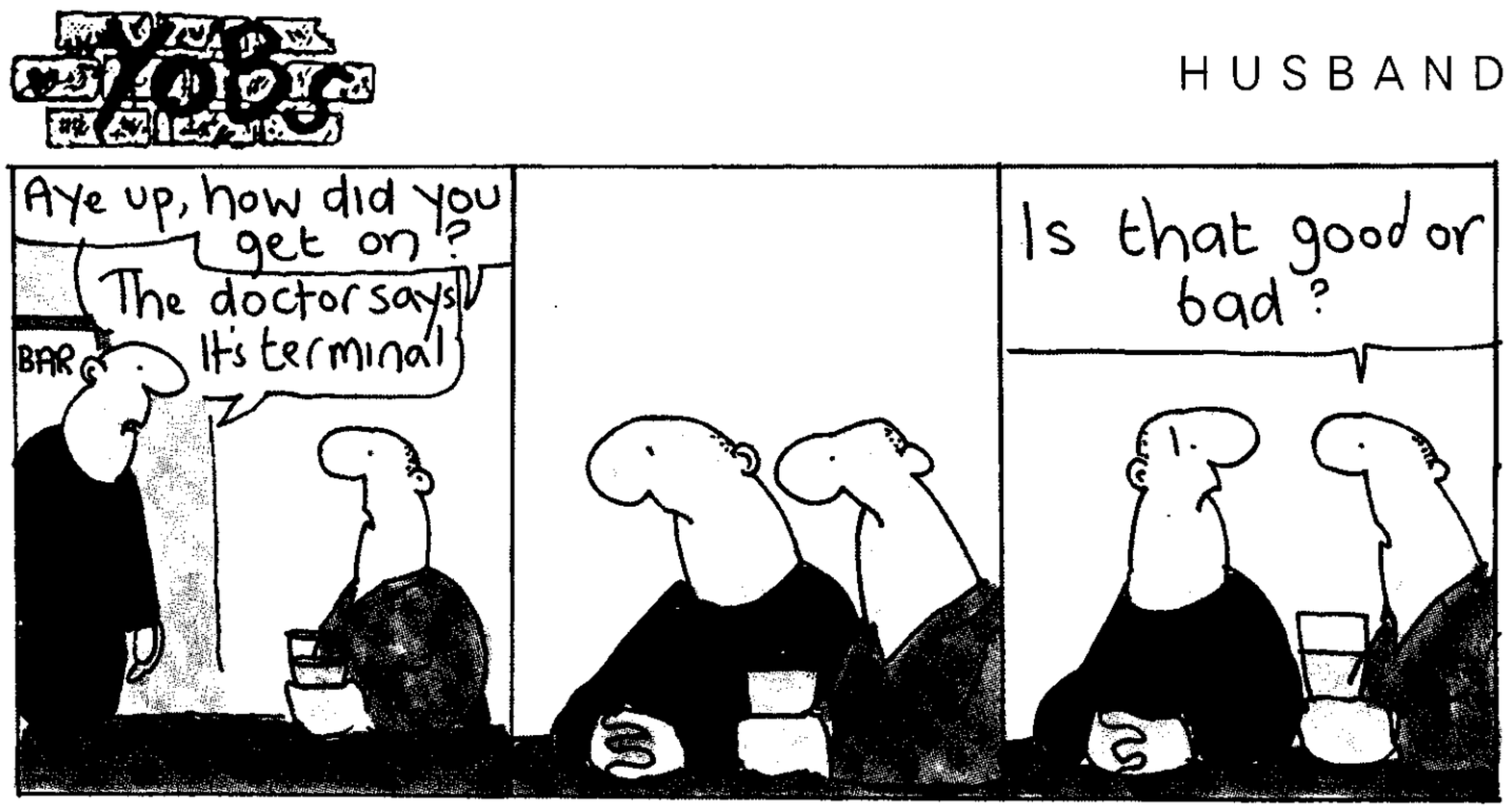
23 Mockery of press at Tony's end (5)

24 Tory leader gone, Hogg's finally in – wild celebration! (4)

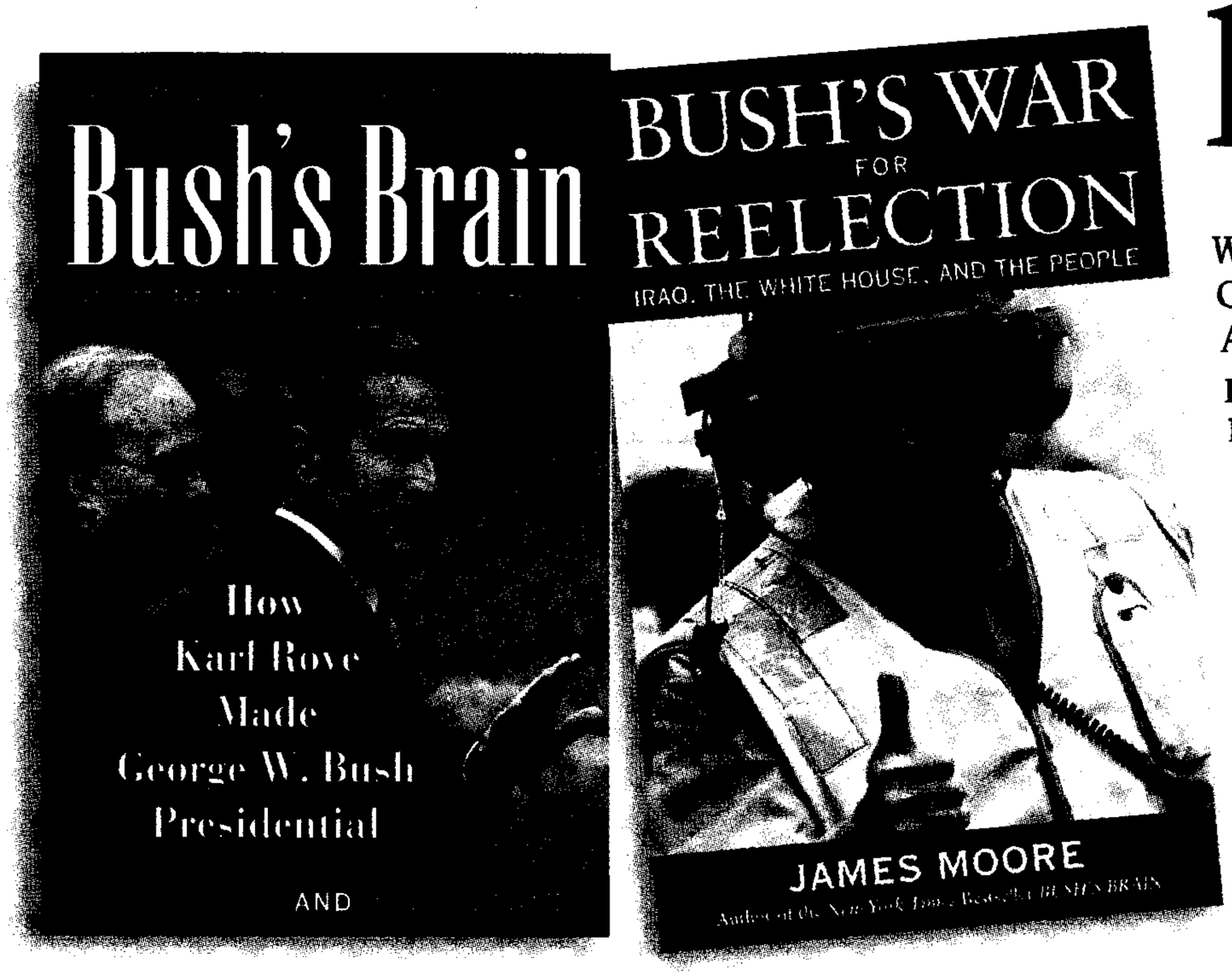
Crossword 260 winner: EVE JACKSON

ACROSS: 1 Virginals 6 Belch 9 Lash out 10 Rooster 11 Entry 12 Runnymede 13/20 Alastair Campbell 15 Prissy 18 Earful 23 Alcoholic 24 Nacho 25 Catsuit 26 Samurai 27 Track 28 Reichstag.

DOWN: 1 Volte-face 2 Rosetta 3 Irony 4 Asteroid 5 Shrink 6 Boobytrap 7 Letters 8 Horde 14 Tough luck 16 Yellowing 17 Narcissi 19 Ricotta 21 Excerpt 22 Ulster 23 Ascot 24 Nymph.



Don't misunderestimate him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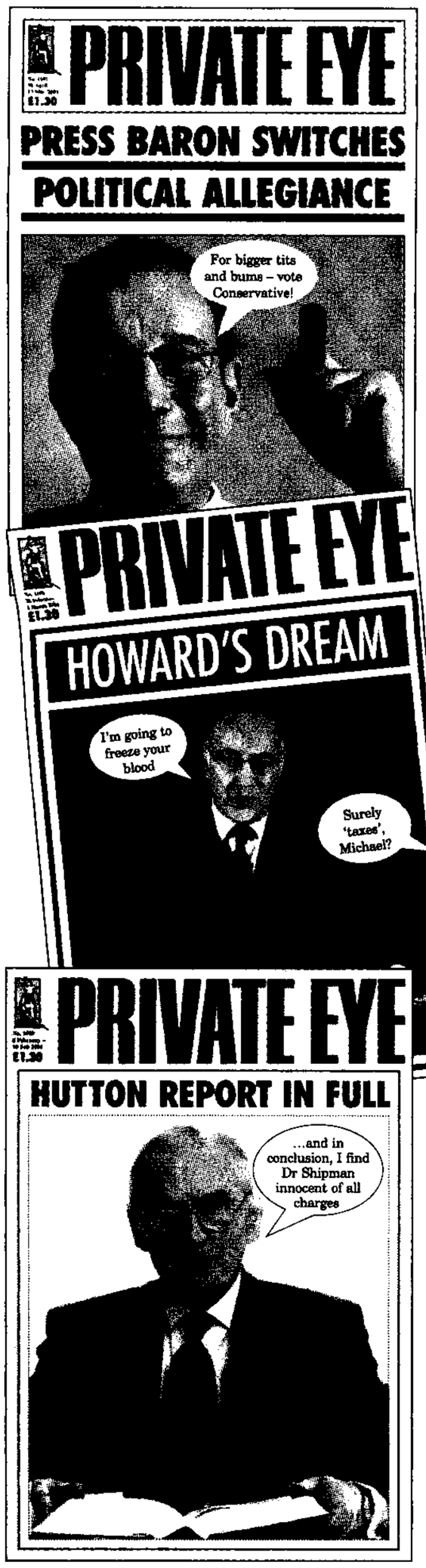
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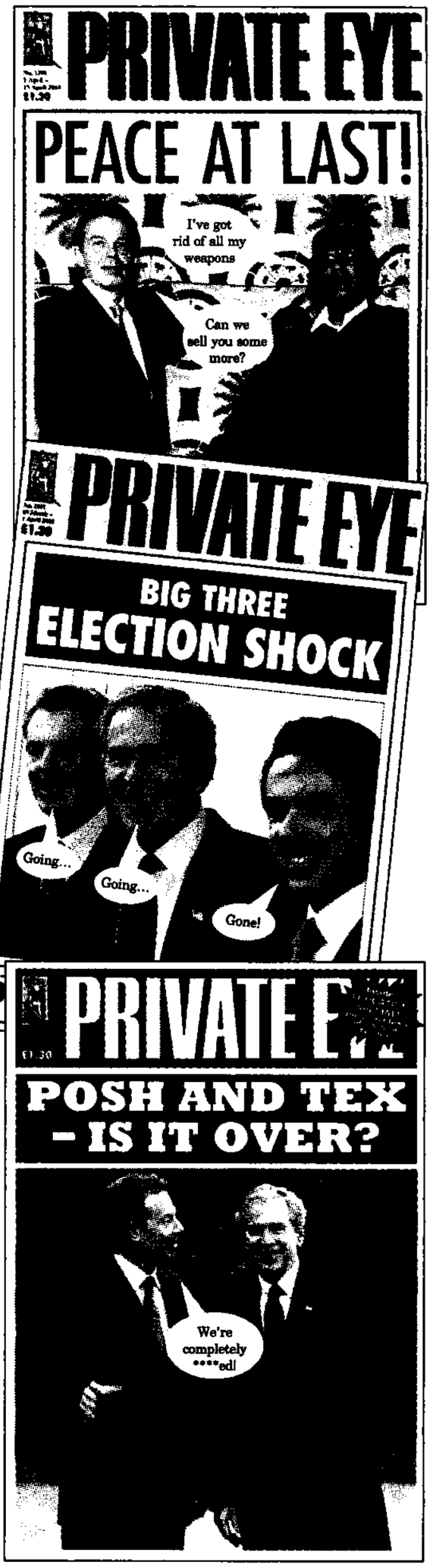

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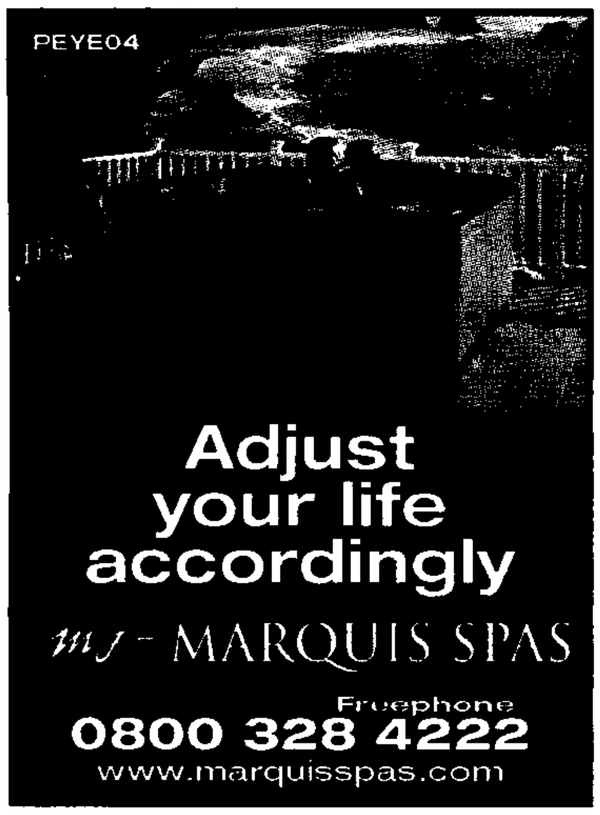

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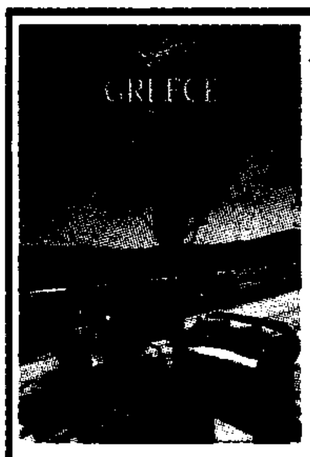

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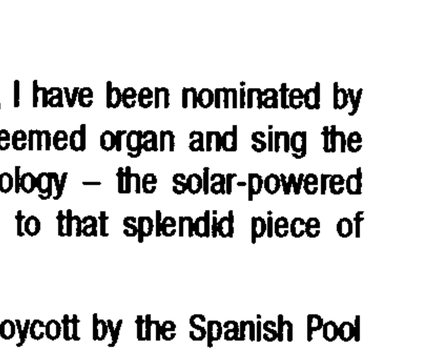

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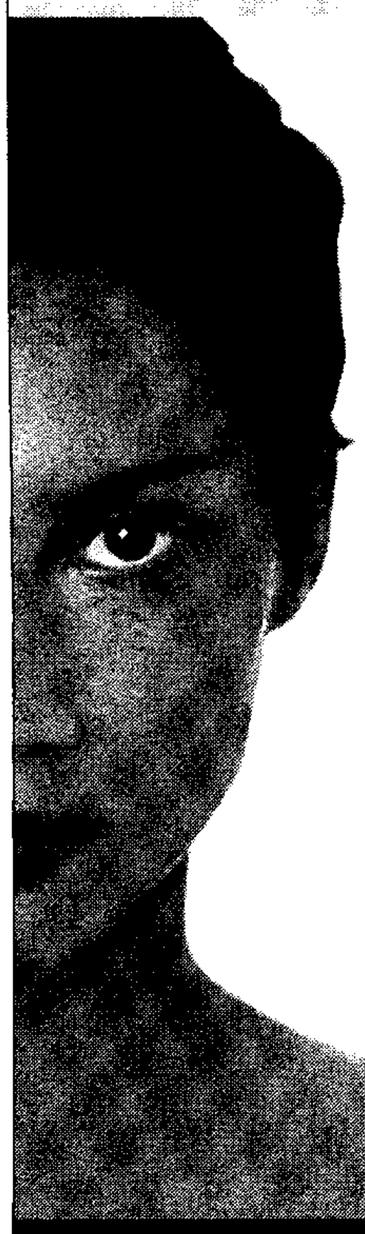

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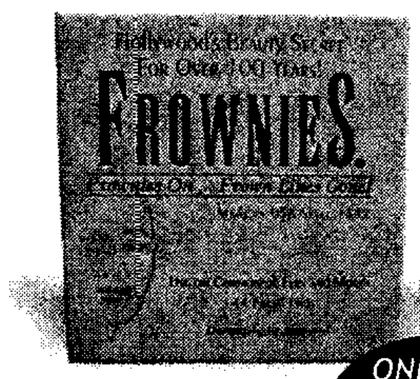

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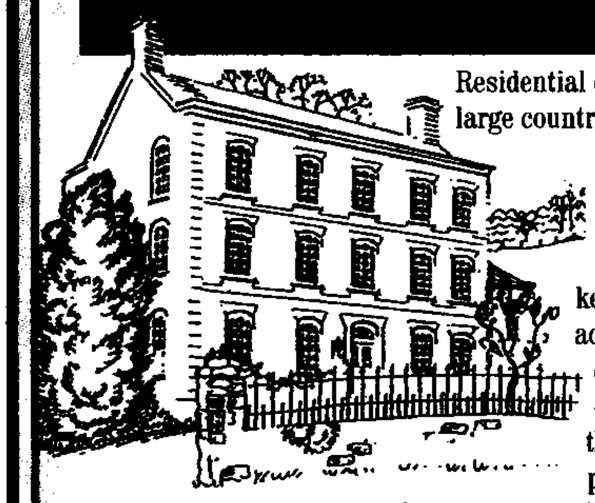

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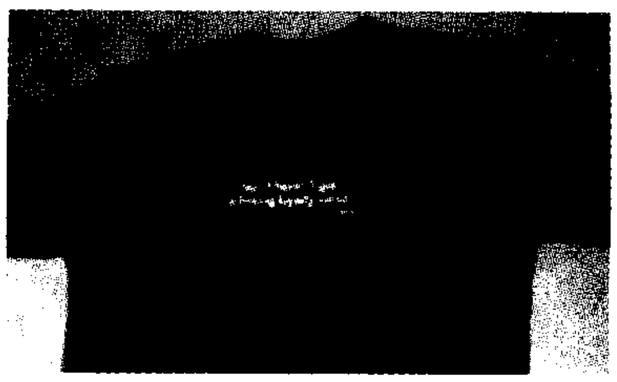

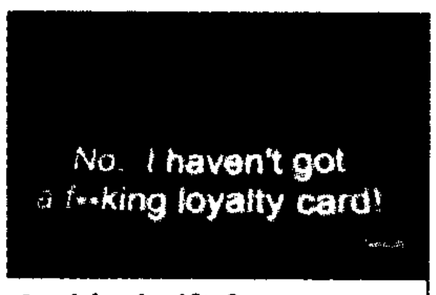

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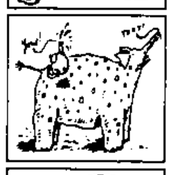

The site also has extensive biographies, including **Ronald Searle** and **Kipper Williams** and the **Search by Subject** pages contain **12** categories from **Art** to **Therapy,** showing over **120** original cartoons.

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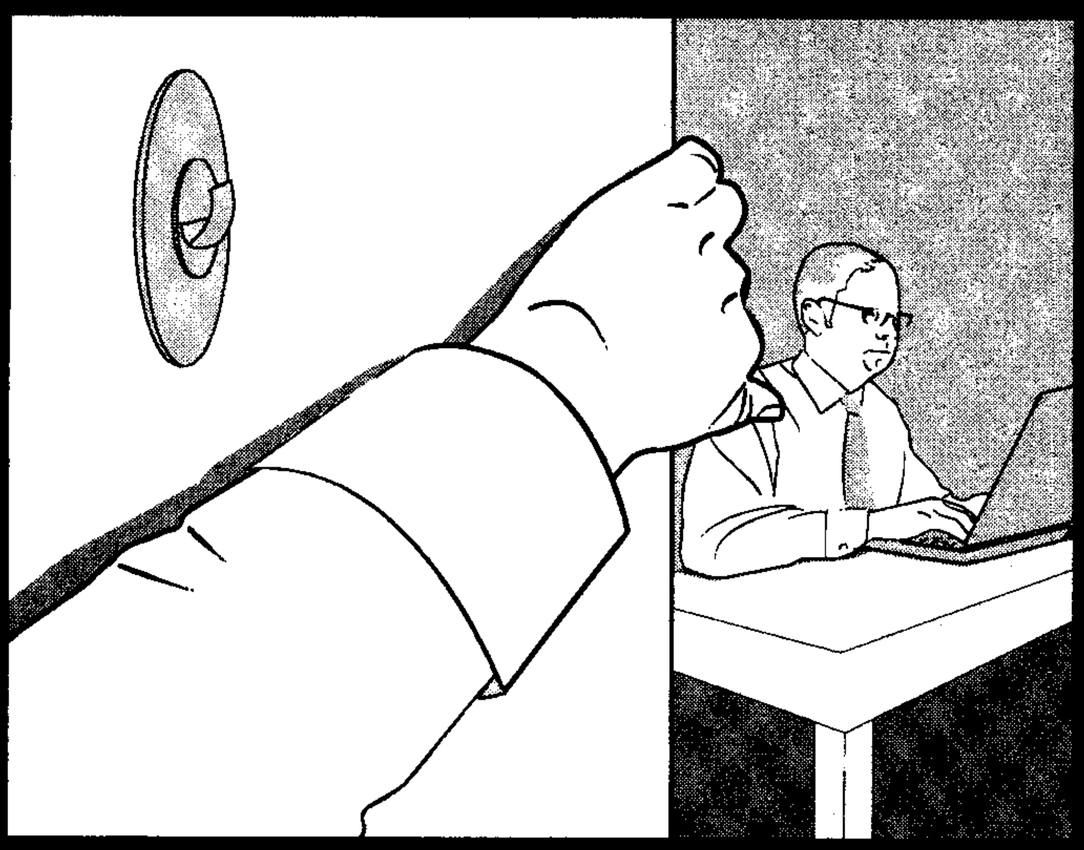

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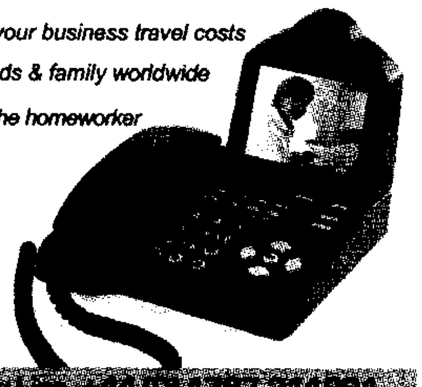

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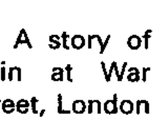

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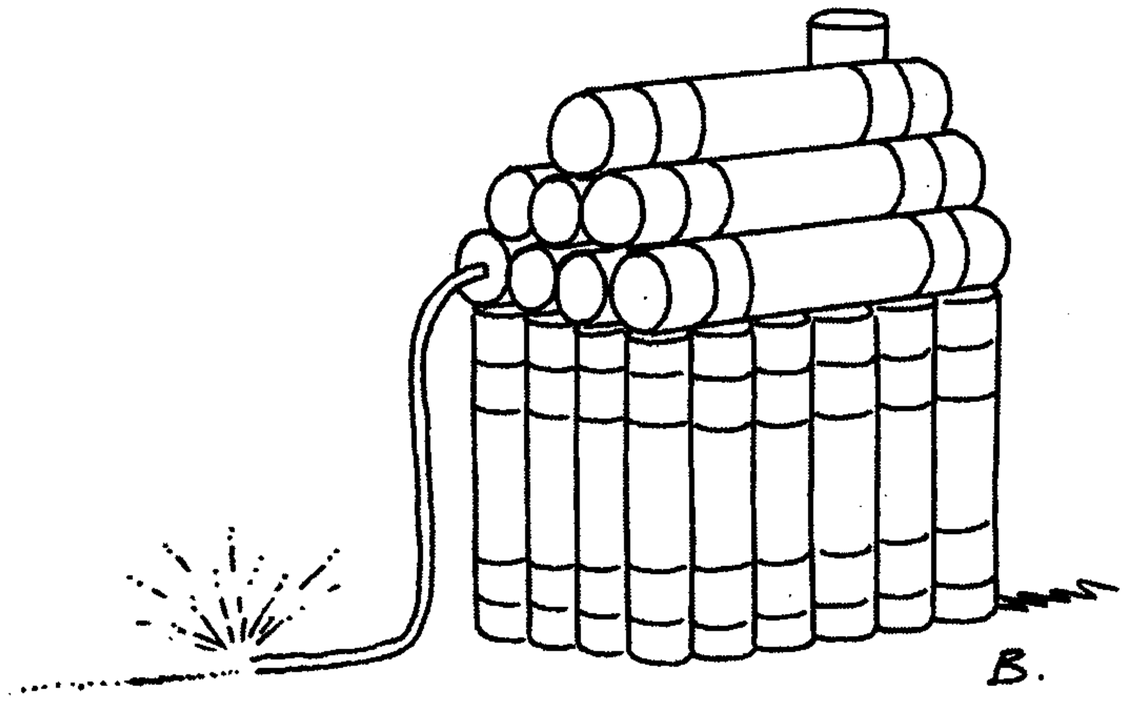

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